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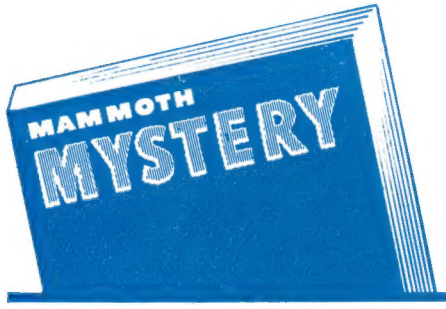

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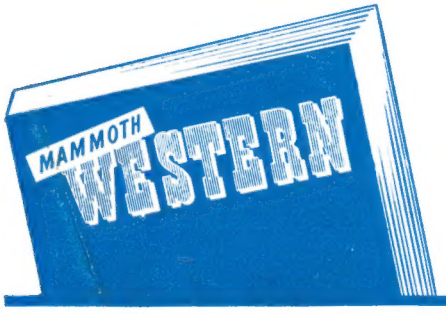

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Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating a scene from "Panama Adder."

Published bi-monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. New York Office, Empire State Building, New York 3, N. Y. Washington office, International Building, 1319 F Street, N.W., Washington 4, D. C. Subscription $2.50 for 12 issues; Canada $3.00; Foreign $4.50. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.

VOLUME 2 **NUMBER 2**

All Stories Complete

VALLEY OF THE BIG SMOKE (Short Novel—26,500)..... by Frances M. Deegan..... 8

Illustrated by Krupa

The frozen North proved to have a couple of hot spots—too hot for the hottest flyers! But Joe Dobson was no amateur and a plane was just a tool as far as he was concerned—

NO HOLDS BARRED (Novelette—11,400)..... by Alexander Blade..... 56

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

A couple of "grunt-and-groaners" show that they've got brains as well as brawn. Jim, as a wrestler was a good "ladies man" but Benjy stepped in every time and helped the two!

CAVERN'S END (Novelette—19,000)..... by C. A. Baldwin..... 76

Illustrated by Malcolm Smith

Sometimes even a ship's stoker can be handy with a scalpel—especially if he's a Doc—Only Jean could make Ryan realize that life was lots better outside of an engine-room!

PANAMA ADDER (Short Novel—36,000)..... by H. B. Hickey..... 116

Illustrated by Henry Sharp

The grim and savage Central American jungle killed better men than Mason—he was told! So he took a gun and showed Blackwell that lead travels both ways—coming and going . . .

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The Editor's Page

"PANAMA ADDER," the cover story by H. B. Hickey, is going to hit you right between the eyes. The author was up to the office a few months ago, and we happened to talk about South and Central America. "Hick" was complaining about that fact that people were getting the wrong impression of our "Good Neighbors" to the South. He thought that everybody was getting the idea that South America was a continent jammed with cities like Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. He reminded us that there was plenty of wild and unexplored territory there. The jungle hasn't been pushed back all the way. He mentioned that there were areas of jungle, hundreds of thousands of square miles in extent. We told him to go ahead and do a yarn on that idea. He did. We think you're going to like it.

WE HINTED in the last issue of *Mammoth Adventure* that we had a real story in the form of the "Valley of the Big Smoke." Well, here it is. We had read the tale in manuscript form and thought a lot of it. But we had to read it a second time in galley form in order to "proof" it. Usually that's rough work. But not in this case! When you read it, watch it closely. We predict that you're going to enjoy it terrifically. You see, it concerns an aircraft pilot who—no, we're stopping right now before we give the whole thing away. Feed us your letters and let us know what you think of it, especially the different "twist."

REMEMBER "Traders in Death" a few issues back? Its author, Alexander Blade, is always good for a fine story. Usually he sticks to pretty straight adventure. This time though he must have gotten an idea from "the grunt-and-groaners" for he comes up with a wrestling story that not only has a good plot, but has a rare touch of humor. In "No Holds Barred," his characters, "Benjy" and "Jim", are strictly out of this world. And yet there's a bit of sadness to them. You'll like every word of this off-trail yarn.

"CAVERN'S END" by a new author, C. A. Baldwin, takes us to the South Pacific before the Japs messed up things. You'll like the hero particularly, we think, because you've probably heard of guys like he, getting the same sort of deal. It's a hard-hitting story that even impressed us. And we've seen all kinds. The hero is a stoker and a *doctor*—how's that for a pitch?

THE last thing in the world that your editors consider themselves, is a thinker. Yet, even now and then we have to stop and reflect on the way the word "adventure" may be interpreted. We used to think of it as being mainly concerned with exotic and different happenings. Well, that still is true but there are some other things, very near home, that are adventurous. Think of the excitement connected with the atomic bomb—its manufacture we mean. Or better yet, how would you like to be down in White Sands, New Mexico where they're testing the giant V-2's?

IF YOU'RE interested in that sort of thing, we suggest you give our sister—no, "big brother" —magazines a whirl. For some unusual and fascinating reading try our companions, *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures*.

THE May issue of *your* magazine will provide some very fine fare. You've seen Berkeley Livingston's name in *Mammoth Adventure* a number of times and he's done some strictly solid stuff for our other two "brothers", *Mammoth Detective* and *Mammoth Mystery*. "Berk" is one of those guys that can't let you down. When he starts a yarn on his battered old portable, it's bound to come out good. Keep your weather eye peeled for his "The Fragrant Vagrant." It's a short novel with machine-gun action, but the title doesn't mean "The St—"oops! We'd better watch ourselves.

PHIL SHARP—recognize that name?—has a clever little historical short, involving a swordsman. But he liked his dueling to be private. He had a good reason . . .

WE'VE got a short novel on the Alcan Highway also coming up. William G. Bogart did it. It's called "Death Rides the Alcan" and it shows how a war-built road has a tough time even after the war. There are thrills galore in taking a heavy truck to Alaska over a highway infested with hijackers. We hope you will like it as much as we did.

COMING up too, is a terrific historical novel by that master, Richard S. Shaver. "Loot of Babylon" is its name, and it's the kind of a story that makes you feel as if you're living it. Don't miss it. It's Shaver at his best!

THAT about brings things in order for this month. Keep those letters coming! There's no better way for us to judge how you want your favorite magazine, than to take the advice in your letters. From what we see, this "balanced diet" theory of ours seems to suit you just right. Good modern adventure, mixed with historical stuff and some off-trail yarns, are apparently the combination that suits you. That's o.k. with us. See you . . . ***Rap.***

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The plane dove shriekingly toward the valley

VALLEY OF THE BIG SMOKE

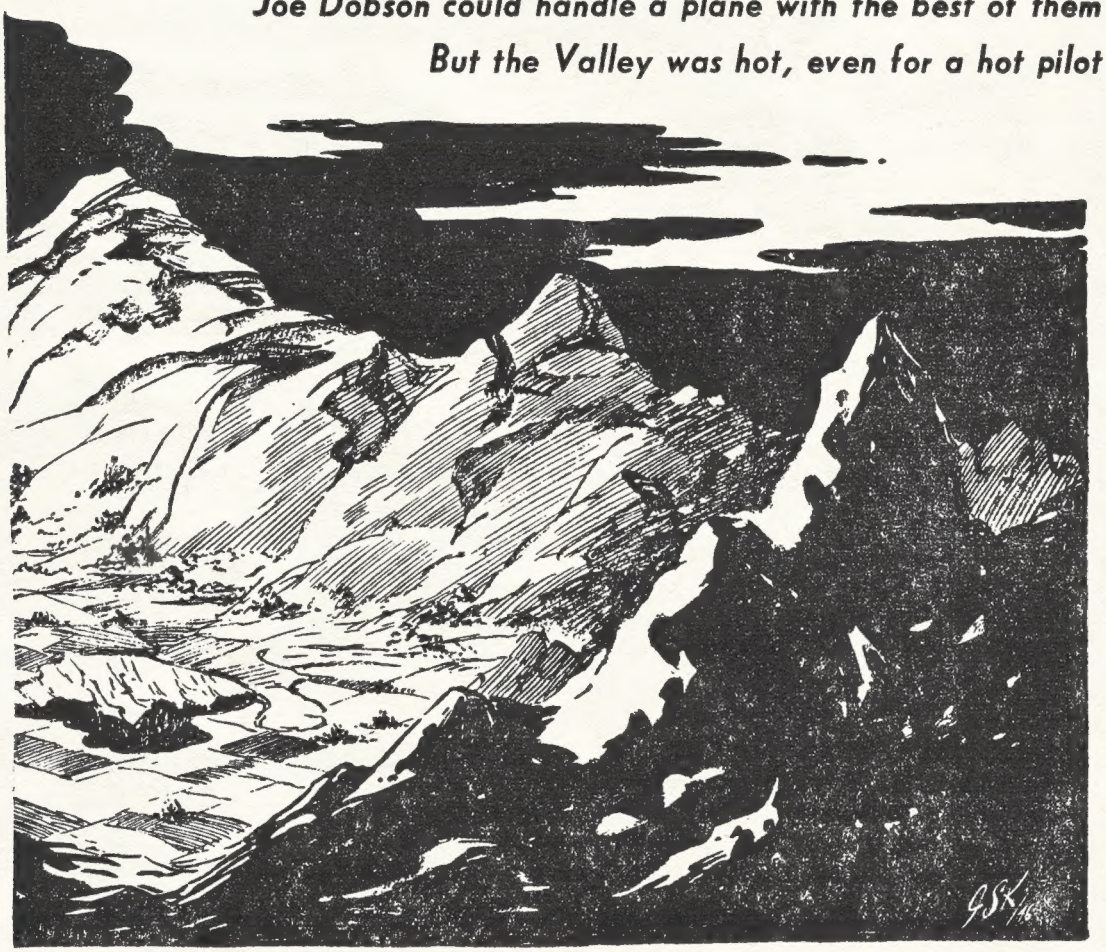
By Frances M. Deegan

THE ramshackle town of Kits Harbour, British Columbia, huddled dispiritedly under chill, gray skies. Out in the harbor a coastal freighter was creeping toward the wooden pier like a bedraggled mongrel sneaking up to the back door. Nobody in the town appeared to have noticed.

A lonely wind whistled up the dismal main street from the water front. It writhed fitfully among the wooden buildings and slapped at the sign hung over the door of the Horseshoe Bar.

Inside the saloon Gyp Anger raised a dark bearded face and scowled briefly before returning to his game of solitaire. On the opposite side of the table, Joe Dobson was oblivious to everything

Joe Dobson could handle a plane with the best of them
But the Valley was hot, even for a hot pilot



but the tablet of stationery before him. On it he was laboriously inscribing a letter with a badly chewed pencil.

Two dim bulbs with tin reflectors hung at either side of the horseshoe bar, lighting a group of four men who were laughing loudly at their own rough banter. Isolated as they were in the shadows, the lean face of Gyp Anger had a sinister cast, while that of his companion was frankly tough, like a somewhat battered bulldog with red whiskers.

Gyp turned over the last card, grunted, swept up the pack in big hands and reshuffled expertly. Once more he laid out the cards with patient precision. Instead of playing the game, however, he studied the pudgy little roughneck opposite.

Joe's ragged thatch of sandy hair was still bent over the tablet, his bruised mouth moving in painful contortions as the pencil formed words. Gyp's icy-blue stare at last brought his head up and he peered across the table uncertainly. One eye was swollen shut, the other damaged by an ugly gash that cut the bridge of his nose slanted upward through his eyebrow.

" 'Smatter?" he croaked hoarsely.

"You've got me worried," said Gyp flatly.

"For cripe's sake, why?" demanded Joe indignantly. "We been through this often enough. You've seen me worse than this, and I never delayed the schedule yet, did I? What's the beef?"

Gyp was interrupted as a newcomer joined the men at the bar, causing riotous sounds of disbelief.

"So help me!" He raised one grimy paw solemnly. "I seen her with my own eyes. Talk about your movie stars—I'll take this one in the flesh. She sashayed off that old tub like—"

"Pokey, old pal," declared a seamy-faced giant. "It's time you took a little trip outside. When you start seein' movie stars—"

"The process of sobering you up in time for the take-off is familiar enough," Gyp went on. "That I don't mind. What I'm worried about is this sudden literary tendency. It's the first time I've seen a binge affect you that way. Are you sure you didn't get into some damfool mess that you're keeping from me, just to spare my tender feelings?"

"Aw, Gyp! Would I hold out on you?"

"Would you?"

"Well, no." Joe turned his bleared gaze downward. "No. Sure not. This is a letter to a friend of mine back in the States. Finchley, his name is. John Finchley. The bats we used to go on together!" Joe shook his head sadly. "Them was the days, brother!"

"YOU don't have to stay up here," said Gyp coldly. "You can go back. Any time. You're still a damn good pilot."

"So what? I'm on the blacklist. And who the hell'd have me, except—" Joe broke off in sudden embarrassment.

"Except a fugitive from justice, Joe? Maybe I shouldn't have told you that. Maybe it bothers you."

"Aw, cripes, Gyp! Cut it out, will you? Whatever it was you did back in the States, it makes no difference to me. I already told you that. I was thinkin' about Mac Kinlock. I meant who'd hire me, except a guy like him, with his wild cat freight service—"

"What a nice name you have for his rackets. Did you think that all up by yourself?"

"Mac's not such a bad guy. No worse than lots of others. What if he does pull a fast one now and then? He's

got to make expenses. It costs something to keep three transports going. And look at all the folks he helps, just by keeping his airline running."

"He's a black-hearted pirate, and you know it. That last load of furs we brought down was stolen. His legitimate freight is just a cover."

"Well, if Mac didn't buy 'em, somebody else would. It's not his fault if the Indians steal stuff."

"The hell it isn't. He encourages them. He pays them for stealing. Just stick with it, friend Joe, and one of these times we'll get caught with the goods. Then see how you feel about Mr. Kinlock's rackets."

"They can't do anything to us! Hell, we're just freighting. Did you ever hear of an engineer getting pinched on account of what was loaded in his freight cars?"

"We're a good deal more familiar with our cargo than a locomotive engineer would be. We even pay for it when we pick it up. Besides—Oh, hell!" Gyp broke off, staring toward the door as it swept open on a blast of wind. "Talk about the devil! Here comes that breed of Kinlock's, looking for me. Now that I've got the cargo stowed, I supposed he changed his mind."

The undersized breed had a pinched, forlorn face and looked lost in the big mackinaw and the wool cap he wore. He passed the group at the bar and spotted Gyp, who watched him approach with grim resignation.

"Kinlock, he say come now," the breed announced thinly.

"Uh-huh. That much I could have guessed," growled Gyp. "Okay, Robair. Thanks. You tell him I come."

WITHOUT another word, the breed turned and stalked out. Gyp rapped on the table and a weather-beaten Chinese shuffled out from behind the bar.

"It is necessary that I ask a favor of you, Lee," Gyp addressed him in Chinese. "I must leave this worthless companion of mine for a short time. See that he has one drink while I am gone, but no more."

Lee bowed respectfully. "I shall see that it is done, Gi-panga."

"If you're telling him not to serve me any more rot-gut," drawled Joe, "you can quit worrying. Lee knows we're due to take off and he'd rather cut my throat than see me cause you any inconvenience. Me, or anybody else around this god-forsaken hole. If I'd known how he was going to feel about it, I'd have spent the war flying the Hump myself. Run along, pal. You can trust Lee to torture me with a temperance lecture while you're gone."

"I know that," retorted Gyp. "I merely told him it was okay to serve you another dose."

"Gee, thanks!" smirked Joe. "I do hope it isn't habit forming."

"Not if you use it for a liniment," said Gyp, standing up to fasten his leather jacket. His rangy frame loomed head and shoulders above the shrunken figure of the Chinese. "I'll be back to settle the tab, Lee."

"Okay, Gi-panga. I bring one more glass liniment," said Lee solemnly.

"Brother, you ain't kiddin'!" howled Joe. "That stuff is strictly for horses!"

He sobered as Gyp strode toward the door, and turned his damaged eyes back to the letter he was writing.

II.

OUTSIDE the saloon Gyp paused to squint at the weather. The low ceiling was a dirty gray and the damp wind from the harbor was freshening

by the hour. Snow would be gathering in the mountains to the east and north. Snow and the unpredictable Chinook. Anything could happen to an old twin-engine transport laboring under a capacity load.

"Bad weather for birds, Gyp?" said a pleasant voice beside him. Gyp turned and surveyed the small round figure of Father Pierre Grosjean.

"Bad enough," he returned shortly.

"Bad enough," repeated the priest. "Yes. Invariably the weather here is bad for flying. Sometimes it is worse, but always bad, never good. It is remarkable that Mac Kinlock has been able to attract so many experienced flyers to a dangerous and dirty job in such unpleasant surroundings."

He waved a hand at the dreary town. Its one street was a straggling dirt road which led up from the harbor, followed the course of the Tommy River for about two miles, and then lost itself in a confusing maze of Indian trails.

"How do you account for it?" he asked softly.

Gyp stirred restively under the priest's gentle probing. "So many flyers?" he sneered. "There are only six of us, father. Only two men to a plane. After working with a full air squadron, six men are not so many. The remarkable thing is that Kinlock has not managed to attract more and better flyers. We were trained for dangerous and dirty jobs. And what is there for us in a peaceful existence?"

"What indeed?" said Father Pierre. "It is too much to expect that avenging angels will settle down to a humdrum life of peaceful monotony. Nevertheless, I can't help feeling that talents such as yours are being wasted here. It distresses me."

"Does it?" snapped Gyp. "What about your own talents, father? It appears to me that you are equipped for something far better than a life of drudgery as a mission priest. Whenever you get too curious about why any of us flyers is up here, ask yourself why you are here. Perhaps we all have our private reasons."

"Perhaps we do," said the priest softly. "And in that case there is no reason for any of us to be touchy about it, is there? Sometimes it is helpful to be frank about such things."

"Confession is good for the soul, eh?" said Gyp coldly. "No thanks, father. I'm not ready to sob out the secrets of a misspent past. My soul is my own business."

"It most certainly is." The priest's chubby face broke into an amiable grin. "And contrary to your stubborn conviction, I am not prying into your past. Indeed I wasn't even thinking of your salvation. I was thinking of my own loneliness, and wishing that I might know you better. I think we might both be interested in the same things. For instance, I have been gathering some strange facts about an inaccessible valley which howls and smokes. What do you think of that?"

"I think the Indians have been stuffing you with their fairy tales," said Gyp roughly, "none of which interest me, father. Sorry, but Kinlock is expecting me." He stepped around the priest and strode off toward the harbor.

"I'll see you in the morning," Father Pierre called after him.

GYP made no effort to turn and explain that he expected to take off in an hour. Or did he? This last minute summons from Kinlock probably had something to do with that coastal freighter. It might mean unloading the entire cargo which had just been so carefully stowed and lashed down under Gyp's supervision.

That meant delaying the take-off

until morning, with possibly an entirely different run to be plotted. And another day and night of nursing his co-pilot through a hangover to prevent him from going off on a second binge. Joe was right for the take-off now, and once they were in the air, his nerves steadied and his need for a drink vanished. But let him spend another fifteen or twenty hours waiting around in the drab town and he'd start hitting the bottle again in sheer desperation.

Kits Harbour was not actually a town. It was still the frontier settlement which had sprung up fifty years before when the gold rush started in the Klondike. Its sole reason for existence was the sheltered harbor. The harbor and Mac Kinlock.

Gyp swung up the wooden steps at the side of the warehouse and manipulated the storm door and inner door with one rhythmic movement which practice had taught him was the safest and smoothest way of getting through both doors. Any hesitation was apt to result in pinched fingers, a banged elbow or a bruised ankle. He considered the spring doors typical of Mac Kinlock. A booby-trap for the unwary.

Minnie Kubik, the dumpy half-breed woman who acted as Kinlock's secretary, scowled darkly and nodded toward Kinlock's closed office. Angry voices were raised inside. Gyp rapped sharply and heard Kinlock's deep voice bellow: "Come in!"

He hesitated briefly at sight of the three strangers. Two men dressed in fur lined leather coats and caps designed for the Northern sportsman stood at one side. On the other was a tall, angry-eyed young woman, draped in a smart mink coat and hood.

Gyp closed the door carefully and confronted the obese Mac Kinlock, who sat behind his battered desk like a gigantic jellyfish with bright, black eyes. The man was formless, his massive bulk overflowing the stout wooden chair, and in freakish contrast his features were delicate. Set in the middle of a grotesque expanse of flesh were finely drawn brows, short, straight nose, and a small mouth through which the deep voice pealed like a sonorous bell.

"Here's an emergency flight, captain," he announced musically. His head squirmed on the folds of his neck as he turned to the young woman standing on his right. "Carrie, this is Captain Anger," he said. "He'll put you down at Fort Simpson safe and sound. Captain, this is Caroline Brindle, the daughter of my old friend Mush Brindle. Her daddy died a few weeks ago up in the MacKenzie. She's going up there."

GYP was aware of several things at once. His own indignation at this foolhardy flight, the hard determination in the girl's green eyes as she stared back at him, and the general feeling of tension in the room. Then the background was momentarily blotted out as both he and Caroline Brindle recognized the antagonism between them. It flared openly for an instant, then her chin lifted and she said coolly: "The captain doesn't seem to be happy about the flight, Mac. Is it very dangerous?"

"It's impossible!" Gyp snapped back at her, and turned to the sharp-eyed Kinlock. "What about your contract schedule?" he asked. "We're loaded and ready to take off. This means we've got to unload again and refit the plane for passengers. We can't take off until tomorrow anyway. Can't this personal business wait another couple of days until Hassel and Green get back from the White Horse run?"

Kinlock folded his plump hands across a broad chest and sat there plac-

idly, gazing back at Gyp, and saying nothing.

"It's imperative that we make the trip at once!" The larger of the two men stepped forward and faced Gyp. His pink, smooth shaven face quivered with indignation. "I was told I could get transportation from here. I'm Phillip Perkins," he declared. "Brindle was my partner. His sudden death has left everything in confusion at the mines. Production has stopped, and unless we can start rush shipments out of there at once—" He broke off and gestured impatiently toward the younger man, a slim, whip-like figure with alert eyes and a forceful jaw. "This is George Grass who is to take Brindle's place."

"Not if I know it," said Caroline Brindle insolently. "You two are phony as a couple of glass eggs, and once I get to the Carabrin Mines, I'll prove it. Mac—" She turned to the mountainous hump behind the desk. "You've got to stop them! You can't let them go!"

"I got to play it neutral, Carrie," said Kinlock melodiously. "This fellow's got what he claims is a signed partnership agreement with Mush Brindle. You say you never heard of him before, and he says he never heard of you. Well, I can understand that. Mush never was one to talk about his affairs."

"But you know me!" Her voice was brittle with anger. "Don't you suppose I'd know if Dad had a partner?"

"I know you," returned Kinlock evenly. "And I know you're Mush Brindle's kid. That's why I say if these fellows go to Fort Simpson in one of my planes, then you go too, along with Father Pierre as an impartial witness to examine Mush's records, and see if he had a partner."

Gyp turned back to the two men and caught them watching him covertly. His ever-present fear of discovery rose and stifled him with a rush of fury. He had a violent urge to swing on these intruders, to beat them back with his fists, to drive them and their reminders of a different life completely away from his sight and his mind. He controlled himself with an effort and regained his impassive expression, eyes icy and distant.

"I think it should be made clear to every one," he said coldly, "that this is no holiday hop. It shouldn't even be attempted except in a case of extreme emergency. If the weather were favorable, the chances of getting through the mountains would be very slim. The weather," he added grimly, "is dirty and getting dirtier."

"I appreciate that only too well—er, captain—isn't it?" said Perkins stiffly.

"Captain, by courtesy of Mac Kinlock," returned Gyp curtly. "All his pilots are captains, whether they deserve it or not."

GEORGE GRASS spoke suddenly. "I'm sure you deserve it, Captain Anger. We've been hearing stories about you all along the coast. If only half of them are true, then you're already a legend in this country, whether you know it or not. Personally, I think we're damn lucky to find you here."

Gyp's jaw stiffened at the flattery. If there was one thing he didn't want, it was notoriety. This fellow was obviously exaggerating about the stories, but even so . . .

One of Mac Kinlock's heavy hands struck the desk with a hollow thump. "I've had enough of this cat fightin'!" he bellowed. "I got a plane ready to go, and here's the pilot, the best damn mountain hopper in the country. Now! How many passengers is goin'?"

"You know the answer to that," said

Perkins. "We're all going, since that's the way you want it. But I should think you'd hesitate to let the daughter of your old friend Mush Brindle risk her pretty neck on such a perilous flight."

"I got a lotta confidence," boomed the fat man, "in him." He jabbed a plump paw at Gyp. "Beginnin' right now, I'm puttin' Carrie in his hands. You—" He waggled the paw and peered up at Gyp with sharp eyes full of warning. "You see that she gets to the hotel safe, and kinda keep a eye on her."

Quite suddenly Caroline Brindle laughed. It was a genuine, wholehearted laugh that displayed even white teeth as she threw back her head. Gyp stared at her in surprise, forgetting his resentment at Kinlock's unorthodox order.

Caroline moved toward him, her green eyes bright with mischief and defiance. "Come on," she said. "I know you won't refuse to protect a weak, helpless female, even if you have to wring her neck doing it."

Well, I'll be damned, thought Gyp, with sudden insight. *She's afraid. She's afraid of all of us. That's why she's laughing like that. What a hell-cat! She'll stop at nothing.*

III.

JOE DOBSON was getting restless. He had long since finished his urgent letter to John Finchley, New York reporter. The one last drink allowed him was nothing but a tantalizing memory. He hated to be alone at any time, but especially when he had the jumps.

He shut his eyes to the dreary atmosphere of the Horseshoe Bar, and tried to remember what it was like when he had congenial companions in pleasant surroundings. The trouble was, he hadn't appreciated them half enough when he had them, especially the women. Now it was hard to recall the little details that made them real. If there were one of them here now. Just one. How he could appreciate—

Some one stood beside the table and he opened his battered eyes carefully, his mouth dropping open at the same time. A gorgeous hunk of damsel stood there, looking at him. She was wrapped in expensive fur. She looked like a Fifth Avenue Eskimo. And she had no business being there. In fact she was impossible.

Joe groaned and closed his eyes. "Go away," he muttered.

"Snap out of it!" said Gyp's voice behind him. "This is Caroline Brindle. We're flying her to Fort Simpson in the morning."

Joe shook his head forcefully and got to his feet. "Somebody's crazier 'n hell," he declared. "Nobody can fly anybody to Fort Simpson in this weather, and besides she's not even real." He lifted a shaking hand and began combing his shaggy hair back with his fingers.

"I'm painfully real as far as Captain Anger is concerned," said Caroline, seating herself. "I hope you're not going to hate me quite so much."

Joe stared at her. "Hate you?" he said. "Why honey, you're the answer to a— Look, you don't want to go to Fort Simpson."

"Yes I do."

"Why?"

"Sit down, and I'll tell you." She flicked a glance at Gyp through her lashes. "Won't you join us, Captain Anger?"

Gyp gazed over her head without speaking and signalled to Lee at the bar before sitting down.

Joe looked dazed. "Gyp," he said

uncertainly. "Is this on the level?"

"No," said Gyp, deliberately misinterpreting the question. "It's wrong as hell. This lady and two other guys are breaking their necks to beat each other to Mush Brindle's holdings up on the Mackenzie. You remember Mush Brindle?"

"Sure. The old sourdough who had the copper mines. He kicked off a few weeks back."

"This lady claims to be his daughter," said Gyp. "And Mac Kinlock backs her up."

"Oh, gosh! I didn't—I'm sorry," stammered Joe.

"IT'S all right," said Caroline softly. "He was an old sourdough. For years. It was tough. I know, because I was with him for a while, until he made a small strike in the Yukon. It was silver that time, and he sold out his claim so he could send me to the States." Her mouth twisted and she said harshly, "He wanted me to be a lady. Instead I married a heel, and he took the money and left me flat. That's why I never got to be a lady."

Joe fumbled his cigarette and dropped it in his embarrassment. Gyp gazed impassively at Lee as he approached with the drinks.

"I'm sorry," Caroline gasped. "It's being back here again after all these years. It kind of gets me."

"Don't let it get you, kid," said Joe. "If you'd rather not talk about it, we'll just—"

"I do want to talk about it. I want you to hear my side of it before those two crooks—"

She broke off as Lee placed a thick shot glass in front of her and a heavy water glass beside that.

"Sorry. Lee hasn't got a wide choice of liquors," said Gyp. "If you'd prefer some bad beer—"

"No, no. This is probably what I need. I just wondered how it got here."

"Lee is something of a mindreader," said Gyp dryly. "By the way, you ought to know him. He's been up in this country for the last century or so."

"No," she said slowly, looking at the wrinkled, expressionless face of Lee. "Up to the time I left this country, I wasn't patronizing saloons. I was only sixteen."

"This lady is the daughter of Mush Brindle," Gyp explained to Lee. "Now that her father is dead she is in a great hurry to reach his side. Therefore we fly her to Fort Simpson tomorrow."

"You come back?" asked Lee flatly.

Gyp shrugged. "When the future asks questions," he said in Chinese, "who can answer?"

Lee stared balefully at Caroline. "A woman's whimsy is sometimes more costly than a war," he said, and shuffled back to the bar.

"I don't think he likes me," said Caroline.

"Don't let that bother you," grinned Joe. "Lee hates all women—and most men. Gyp here, is his only love. On account of Gyp flew over the Hump during the war and managed to find China on the other side. Personally I don't see how he could have missed it. Now you take precision bombing—" Joe sighed and downed his drink. "There I go again," he said. "Reminds me of when I was a kid, and the old soldiers used to sit on the Court House lawn, whacking their canes and fightin' the Civil War all over again."

"You're not quite that decrepit yet," said Caroline. "Although it looks like you made a pretty good try just recently. What was it—a crack-up?"

"Uh-huh," said Joe. "Every payday I crack up. I should never spend any time on the ground. It's the unsafest place I know of. What about these

two crooks . . . honey? You don't mind if I call you honey?"

"MY BEST friends call me Carrie," she said. "Let's be friends, Joe. Shall we?"

"Why, Carrie!" Joe reached for her hand. "I didn't think you had to ask that. I feel like I've known you for a long time. You look like somebody—You know, I could swear I've seen you some place before."

"Maybe you have if you've ever been in New York."

Joe looked at her searchingly. "Where?" he asked.

"Broadway—shows—night clubs. I sang. Maybe you—"

"Wait a minute. Just give me time, and I'll get it."

"I used the name of Cara Brin."

"My God! Of course. Those terrific torch songs. Without that exotic make-up you look—"

"Plain."

"No. Not plain. Not sweet, but more—more real. Oh, Lord! To think that I'd meet you up here! Wait till I write Johnny Finchley, he'll—"

"I know Johnny Finchley! He's that smart reporter that always gets the inside dope on every big crime or scandal that breaks. His competitors claim he has a million stooges to get all that information."

"Stooges?" said Gyp sharply.

"Yes. People who tip him off to secret facts," Caroline explained, but Gyp was looking at Joe Dobson across the table, eyes blazing.

Joe tried nervously to light a cigarette without looking up. The silence became tense.

"I seem to have said something wrong," said Caroline.

"It wasn't you who were wrong this time," said Gyp tightly. "It was me. It's not the first time I've been mistaken about a human being. But I think it's the last. I think I've learned once and for all, never to trust anybody. I thought there was something strange about the sudden passion for letter writing."

Joe steadied his hand on the table and stared at the cigarette. The tip of it was trembling. "You're too quick to jump to conclusions, Gyp," he said carefully.

"On the contrary," said Gyp icily, "it seems to me I'm not quick enough." He stood up and pushed his chair under the table with a gesture of finality. "We take off," he said, "at 0700."

IV.

WITH the waning day Kits Harbour took on a more eerie somberness, the weather-beaten gray of the frame buildings blending with the fog to give it an unreal quality. Lights from the windows were a dull blur, like the eyes of drowsy, half-watchful animals crouching in the mist.

The two-story clapboard building which passed for a hotel had more lights than the usual due to the "outside" guests. Gyp entered wearily and crossed the dowdy front parlor to the stairs. He was hungry and chilled inside and out. The old sense of futility gripped him anew, and the question, "Where can I run to?" was nagging at him again. Flight had a double meaning to him. The clean sweep of a plane through the skies and—disappearance. Two entirely separate meanings, but if he could bring them together, make them both mean the same . . . There must be some place a plane could take him . . .

"Ha! *Capitaine* Jeep!" The hotelkeeper came waddling from the rear, wiping his hands on a greasy apron. "I prepare the special dinner tonight.

Ha-ha! You will be glad you are here. Yes. The soup supreme, the grilled salmon, the fricassee of rabbit, the— But wait. You shall see. I, Jacques Lemonde, I shall extend myself. But no, that is not what I wish to tell you. It is the two gentlemen from New York, which they have ask for you. You will go up now, yes?"

"Okay, Jack. I'll see them." Gyp turned away and mounted the stairs listlessly.

Jacques shook his bald head and thrust a finger into his mouth to dislodge a morsel of his extensive cooking. "That one," he remarked to himself, "he grows more grimmer every day. A woman, naturally." He nodded his head sagely. "Yes, undoubtedly. It is a woman who has done this to him." He spat out a morsel viciously, along with a choice epithet to express his opinion of women.

The door to one of the front bedrooms was open and as Gyp came along the narrow upper hall he heard the clink of glasses and smelled the rich fragrance of an expensive cigar. Phillip Perkins and George Grass were seated in the only two chairs the room afforded. The wiry Grass was tilted back in a nicked wooden kitchen chair, while Perkins sprawled his heavy form in a tattered, old-fashioned morris chair.

"COME in Captain Anger," called Grass as his chair legs hit the floor. "We thought you might like a taste of bonded liquor. We were warned that the best thing available up here is aged mule, so we came prepared."

"Thanks," said Gyp. He sat down on the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette. Perkins studied him through the haze of his cigar.

"You don't look very cheerful," he said at last. "Worried about the flight?"

"Naturally." Gyp accepted the highball from Grass. "I've been at the field all afternoon, getting weather reports."

"Look bad?" asked Grass.

"Bad enough," said Gyp.

"How bad?" inquired Perkins mildly. He seemed to be measuring Gyp. Trying to place him in the proper category in order to know exactly how to use him.

"There is no official report of snow yet," said Gyp patiently. "But all indications point to a heavy fall to the northeast, and soon. Possibly blizzards in some sections. The first heavy snowfall has held off longer than usual this year, so when it comes we'll probably get it all at once."

"You're pretty experienced at that sort of thing, aren't you?" asked Perkins.

Gyp moved his shoulders in irritation. "Yes," he said shortly.

"You're a communicative cuss," said Perkins amiably. "In words of one syllable. What I really wanted to ask you was something about Mush Brindle. You needn't answer if you feel that it's contrary to your employer's best interests. I'm merely curious. It occurred to me that if Brindle kept his partnership with me a secret, he might have made other connections which he didn't advertise. I don't want to get snarled up in a lot of unexpected controversy as a result. Especially right now when production is the main thing." He sat up to deposit the long ash from his cigar in the tin tray holding bottles and glasses.

Gyp downed the last of his highball. The mellow liquor warmed him pleasantly and quickened his thoughts.

"Well," he prompted.

"Just what was the connection between Mush Brindle and Mac Kinlock?" asked Perkins.

"The same as all the other connec-

tions Kinlock has in this country, as far as I know," said Gyp. "Straight business. Whenever he sold him any goods, or did any freighting for him, he charged the same as he charged everybody else, and handled it the same way."

"He still might have had a separate agreement with Brindle," said Grass insistently.

"What kind of an agreement?" asked Gyp. "Brindle was mining copper and selling it. He apparently had a good market for all that he could produce. Why should he make separate agreements with anybody? And why not ask Kinlock if he had any connection with the Brindle mines."

"KINLOCK," said Perkins, leaning on his elbows and locking his fingers, "is a rare bird. If he had wanted me to know about any connection he might have had with Brindle, don't you suppose he would have volunteered the information when I introduced myself as Brindle's partner? That would have been the logical thing to do. But he said nothing whatever. Instead he sided with this nervy young woman who suddenly claims to be Brindle's daughter. I know for a fact that it was Kinlock who sent for her. She told me so herself."

"It seems odd," said Gyp, "that you had never heard of her. I understand she was pretty well known in New York."

"She was notorious," said Perkins. "One of those flashy entertainers who is constantly in the news with some new stunt. Then she suddenly retired to a Park Avenue apartment. There were a good many rumors as to who the lucky man was, but none of them was ever proved. She was too discreet. So it was assumed he was somebody of importance who couldn't afford to be identified. I'd heard plenty about her, but never a hint that she was Mush Brindle's daughter. It came as a great surprise when I read about it in the papers. 'The Copper Heiress,' they called her. Naturally, I sent for her at once. But instead of explaining herself, she became antagonistic and accused me of being the imposter. The very fact that she was so quick to take the offense seemed to me to be suspicious in itself."

"So you think that she and Mac Kinlock are trying to do you out of Brindle's share in the partnership?" asked Gyp.

"I think they're trying to do me out of the whole business!" said Perkins indignantly. "By repudiating my agreement with Brindle. If that woman had come to me with satisfactory proof of kinship, I'd have been only too glad to accept it and acknowledge her right to Brindle's share in the mines. She offered no proof whatever. She simply declared that I was a liar!"

"As a partner, you must have certain legal rights," said Gyp. "I don't see how they can get around that."

"You must understand that this is not a corporate agreement," explained Perkins. "Brindle was not a businessman. He had no conception of how a business should be run. When he needed money for expanding his operations. I raised the money and entered into the partnership agreement. Certainly I have legal rights, but if they manage to tie everything up in litigation, where does that leave me? Think of the time and money it would cost. That sort of litigation could go on for years. I don't intend to let it start," he said softly. "I'm no sucker."

Gyp glanced at him quickly. The man's rugged face was ugly with determination, and Gyp thought with sardonic amusement that here was an op-

ponent for the wily Mac Kinlock who could probably give him a real battle. Something he'd like to be around to see, if he didn't have other things on his mind.

"What do you want?" demanded Grass suddenly.

Gyp turned and saw Robair standing in the doorway. The breed had made no sound and might have been standing in the hallway for some time. His pinched face looked as forlorn as ever, but his black eyes glittered. He ignored Grass and spoke to Gyp.

"Kinlock he say find Carrie," he announced accusingly. "She with you."

"Oh, hell!" said Gyp. "Isn't she in her room?"

"She with you," repeated Robair stubbornly.

"She's with Dobson," rasped Gyp. "And I suppose by this time they're both plastered. Come on. I may need your help."

V.

AFTER visiting various bootleg establishments without success, Gyp led Robair back to the Horseshoe Bar in the hope of trailing his quarry from there. This proved to be unnecessary. His quarry was seated at the usual table with Caroline Brindle beside him. She had opened her coat and pushed back her hood to reveal silky chestnut hair falling in loose waves to her shoulders. She caught sight of Gyp striding angrily toward them and put her hand on Joe's arm.

Joe had reached the dignified stage of drunkenness. He reared back his head stiffly and said formally: "Good evening, gentlemen."

"I'll remind you again," said Gyp flatly. "We take off at 0700. We're heading straight for a storm. I may need a little help."

"So?" said Joe, trying to open his eyes wider.

"Come on! Get your carcass out of that chair and get out of here! I know damn well I can't trust you, even to stay halfway sober. But I'd think you'd have enough pride left to make you want to be able to stand up when you get to the field in the morning, instead of sitting here all afternoon guzzling—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Caroline savagely. "You cold-blooded buzzard! You break the guy's heart, and then you blame him for taking a few drinks. We haven't been sitting here all afternoon. We went down to Minnie Wahoo's shack for a fish dinner. And he hasn't been guzzling." She caught her breath angrily. "I wish somebody'd take a crack at you and knock some of those icicles off your brain."

"What are you getting so hot and bothered about?" demanded Gyp. "Is it any of your business? Do you even know what you're talking about?"

"I don't know what it was you accused him of," she snapped. He won't tell me. But whatever it was, brother, you're wrong as a two dollar fiddle. This guy would no more hurt you than he'd cut off his own head! The poor sap thinks you're a god with wings—"

"Carrie, please control yourself, honey," said Joe stiffly. "Let's not dramatize ourselves. Let's be courageous, but dignified. Let's get the hell out of this stinking joint."

"Kinlock sent for you," Gyp told Caroline as Joe stood up with exaggerated care. "He sent Robair here, with the message."

"Is that Robair?" Caroline looked astonished. She got up slowly and put her hands on the breed's arm. "Little Robair? I wouldn't have known you! You—you've grown up—or something. You used to be a fat little imp and I used to chase you with a stick when

you stole things out of the cook shack. I can't believe it!"

Something strange had happened to the breed's face. The pinched look had broken up into something like anguish, and his thin lips quivered with inarticulate emotion. It was impossible to judge whether he was overcome with joy or grief. Finally he got out strangled words.

"Kinlock — he say — come now." Then he turned and marched rapidly out.

Caroline put one hand to her face. "I wonder," she said anxiously, "if I've changed that much."

"If you're changed, Carrie, it's all for the better," said Joe gallantly, offering her his arm.

GYP stepped along behind them as they went out into the foggy night. The narrow, board sidewalk was wet and slippery underfoot but Joe carried himself stiffly erect, and it was difficult to tell whether he was helping Caroline, or she was supporting him. In any case, Gyp decided, he was not as drunk as he might have been.

The two shots came from across the road. But they were not nearly as surprising as the one which answered, almost under Gyp's nose as he went down, dragging Caroline with him. Joe was already down, and lying motionless.

Caroline fought and squirmed in his arms like a furry animal.

"Damn you!" she panted. Gyp released her at the sound of running footsteps. He unhooked the flashlight from his belt and caught Robair in the light, running toward them with a gun in his hand.

"Put that gun down!" barked Gyp.

The breed kept on running toward them, his eyes glittering like an animal's in the light, until he saw Caroline getting to her feet.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" demanded Gyp.

"Kinlock he say—"

"I don't give a damn what Kinlock said. What's the idea of shooting—"

"I don't shoot." Robair's tensely held breath was expelled all at once. "I wish I find somebody who does. Him I kill."

"What's goin' on out there?" called a harsh voice from a safe distance.

"Nothing!" yelled Gyp. "Just a couple of drunks!"

"What'd he say?" called some one from further up the street.

"Couple of drunks cuttin' up," returned the first inquirer. "Just what I thought."

Caroline was still panting, and holding the automatic she had fired.

"The next time," she said hotly, "don't interfere with my aim. You're liable to get nicked!"

"So that's the way we're going to play," said Gyp somberly. "I wish you had told me sooner."

"Joe," said Caroline uncertainly. "Joe! Are you hurt?"

Gyp swung the flash downward. Joe was crumpled awkwardly on one shoulder, his hips and legs off the sidewalk. Blood was streaming from a wound in his scalp, just above the left ear. Gyp cut off the flash.

"You and Robair will have to carry him," said Caroline, her voice only a little shaky.

"I can manage him," said Gyp shortly. "If you can trust Robair, you walk on ahead with him. Whoever those playmates of yours are, they'll probably want to try it again. Just remember to duck."

"Don't worry about me," she said harshly. "You make sure you handle Joe carefully. Come on, Robair. I'll walk in front and you walk in the road at the side and keep a sharp ear

to the rear."

GYP hoisted Joe up on one shoulder in the fireman's carry. Joe was still out and breathing heavily, but from the flash glimpse he had had of the wound it did not look fatal. Walking as rapidly as he could under Joe's weight, he and his escort reached the hotel safely. Dinner was being served in the dining room and the upper floor appeared to be deserted. He stretched Joe on his bed and sent Robair for the doctor.

His first impression proved to be correct. As he washed away the blood he uncovered a two inch gash in the side of Joe's head, not much worse than some of the wounds Joe acquired in his brawls.

Caroline had thrown off her furs and sat on the other side of the bed, holding Joe's hand in both her own.

"He'll be all right," she said firmly. "Won't he?"

"It's hard to tell," said Gyp noncommittally. "Meanwhile you're supposed to go see Mac Kinlock. You'd better go. When he sends for anyone he expects them to get there without wasting any time."

Her eyes flashed up at him angrily. "I'm not leaving until—"

"Looks like you'll have to leave now," said Gyp. "Here's the doctor."

Long-limbed Dr. Sven Egstrom came into the room in his quiet unhurried way and leaned over the bed to look at Joe.

"Shootings," he said gutturally. "Tch-tch-tch. Bad business. We have not enough sickness and accident without shootings yet. Well, this feller, he's got everything else happen to him. He might as well have a shooting too." He busied himself with a battered old bag.

Caroline picked up her furs and stood there uncertainly.

"Going?" asked Gyp.

She flicked a brief, questioning glance at him and then looked down as her hand stroked the glossy fur. Her jaws were clenched tightly.

Gyp grinned at her wolfishly. "Afraid?" he taunted.

"No! You louse!" she muttered savagely, and flung her coat about her shoulders, twitching it into place as she fairly pranced out of the room.

"I am," said Gyp, as he caught up with her in the hall. "I don't like to walk with ladies who get shot at in the dark."

Her shoulders continued to twitch as she ran down the stairs and crossed the parlor. But she didn't tell him to stay behind.

Gyp remained a half step behind her all the way until she got caught in the storm door and cried out sharply as the heavy spring slammed the door against her trapping one ankle. Gyp braced the outer door back and helped her inside.

"Ju-just a minute," she said, clinging to his arm and trembling with the effort to keep from crying. She took two deep breaths, and said, "There! That's all right. Thanks."

She turned away and limped across the vacant outer office to Mac Kinlock's door. The fat man appeared not to have moved. He gazed at them blandly without speaking. Waiting for them to tell him what he already knew.

GYP forestalled Caroline's recital of the shooting by declaring: "It looks like the flight to Fort Simpson will have to be postponed after all."

"Maybe not," boomed Kinlock melodiously. "Captain Dobson is a tough chechako. If he can still breathe, he can fly. Wouldn't be the first time he took off with a couple holes an' gouges in him. I ain't worried about him. How's

Carrie behavin'?"

"Very capably," said Gyp. "She's quick on the draw. She can hold her own in anybody's war."

"Ain't forgot how to shoot, eh, Carrie?" said Kinlock approvingly.

"What did you want to see me about?" Caroline asked tensely.

"Who was shootin' at you, Carrie?" chimed Kinlock.

"How do I know? Maybe some of Joe Dobson's friends got tired of using their fists on him."

"It wasn't Joe Dobson they was aimin' at. If you could identify either one of those two fellows—Perkins or Grass, they could both be held. That would solve your problem for the time bein'. They already paid me their passage money. Thousand dollars I charged 'em. We'd just fine 'em that amount, so I wouldn't be out anything. Maybe we couldn't prove anything against 'em, but by the time they got loose again, you'd already have what you wanted up at the Carabrin."

"She couldn't identify them, and neither could I," said Gyp harshly. "We couldn't see anything in that fog. If you intend to pull anything like that, I'll tell you right now, I won't have anything to do with it."

"I didn't think you would," said Kinlock comfortably. "I'm just explorin' all the angles."

"If you really wanted to be helpful," said Caroline bitterly, "you could simply refuse to give them passage."

"No, I can't," said Kinlock. "I'm in business up here an' I can't afford to come right out an' antagonize these fellows. I spent good money phonin' long distance for information about Perkins. An' he's just what he says he is. A minin' engineer turned promoter. He's got money, so why would he come tearin' all the way up here, except to protect his legitimate interests? Say he does take over the mines an' start runnin' 'em. Look at all the business I lose, just by refusin' him a plane ride."

"All right," said Caroline wearily. "What did you want to see me about—outside of that?"

Kinlock pursed his lips and folded his hands across his chest. "I want to see that last letter your daddy wrote you. The one you told me about."

"I haven't got it with me."

"But you could get it. You brought it along, didn't you?"

"No. Why do you want to see it? I told you what he said."

"I don't think you told me all of it, Carrie. An' since you won't let me see it, you practically told me what I wanted to know. There had to be a special reason for this desprit race you're carryin' on. Thank you, Carrie. An' good night."

VI.

IT WAS still black night when the ill-assorted passengers arrived at the field the next morning. Gyp had spent an hour before their arrival checking weather reports. There were scattered snow flurries throughout the northeast. He was not particularly worried. He did not care very much whether they made it or not. A crash on some lonely mountain might be the final answer to his problem—flight and disappearance.

Joe Dobson had insisted that he was perfectly capable of making the flight. He knew that his faculties were not coordinated, but he depended upon the familiar feel of the controls and long habit of flying to perform automatically. He did suggest, half hopefully, that they need not make the flight.

When Gyp came into his room that morning, he said: "It's crazy, and you know it. We can simply refuse to make

the flight, and what can Mac do? He needs us. For myself, I don't give a damn. I'm going to hell anyway. But you — you're —" He faltered and blurted out, "You shouldn't be taking risks like this!"

Gyp stood beside the bed and looked at him, eyes icy and bitter. Joe fumbled for a cigarette on the chair which served as a bed table, and got it lighted. He exhaled a shaky stream of smoke, and said softly, "About that letter I wrote, Gyp—"

"Skip it!" said Gyp flatly. "I'm going to the field. You round up the passengers and get 'em out there, if they haven't already killed each other."

Gyp stood beside the plane as his passengers climbed out of the truck which had brought them. Even Father Pierre looked slightly grumpy and uncomfortable in the chill darkness. Caroline Brindle was the last to step down. As she walked toward him, Gyp stared angrily. Under each arm she carried a long, sweatered dachshund, their rat tails wagging foolishly.

"What do you think you're going to do with those things?" demanded Gyp harshly.

"They're going with me," snapped Caroline.

"I suppose you've already got permission from Mac Kinlock, so it would be a waste of time if I object?"

"Naturally."

"All right. But I'm warning you now. If one of them gets loose and starts raising hell, I'll step on it."

"Okay, hard guy! Now run along and torment the rest of your passengers for a change, will you?"

"I don't need to," said Gyp. You'll all be tormented plenty once we get over the mountains."

THE flight began smoothly enough as Gyp took the plane up and headed north. He turned the controls over to Joe and started calling Fort Graham. When he finally raised the operator, he got a report of snow to the east.

"What are you doing up there, Gyp?" inquired the operator. "Emergency?"

"I'm here," retorted Gyp. "So somebody must think so. Destination Fort Simpson."

"Oh-oh," said the operator distinctly. "Better keep in touch until you raise Fort Nelson. And luck to you. I'll be holding a rabbit's hind foot!"

"Thanks," said Gyp. He wanted to add "Sonny." The operator sounded very young.

After the first hour the passengers relaxed comfortably, satisfied that the trip was no more dangerous than any other they had experienced. Then they hit the mountains. As they veered eastward over the Coastal range they still had a strong tail wind from the Pacific, but the air became increasingly bumpy as gray daylight began to spread through the murk. The passengers began to look a little sick. All except the dachshunds. They sat side by side on the seat next to Caroline looking interested.

Gyp did not care how sick his passengers got. They had been warned of the nature of the trip. But he began to watch Joe more closely. The first fresh bounce Joe had displayed earlier that morning was rapidly wearing off. He was tired and sick and showed it. When they hit the first snowstorm and the plane appeared to wallow in the dizzy swirl of gray whiteness, he took over the controls. Joe tried to grin, but it was a shame-faced, half-hearted grimace and he gave up without a protest.

From then on the flight became a weird nightmare in an unearthly element. They appeared to be lost in

some strange dimension where they were buffeted about by giant idiots without making any progress whatever.

THEY made only one brief contact with Fort Nelson to the northeast after crossing the Stickine Mountains. After that they were alone, battling the blinding white fury that seemed to have no limits. It went on and on until it became maddening, and nerves played queer tricks on the senses. The motors seemed to have a strange, unnatural rhythm, and the vibration seemed to build up to an alarming pitch and then suddenly break off completely, as if the plane were a live thing, holding its breath in the smothering whiteness.

At 1200 Gyp knew that he had missed Fort Nelson. He headed due North and tried to pick up Fort Laird. That he had gotten this far was a kind of minor miracle which only Joe Dobson appreciated. It was impossible to maintain altitude sufficient to clear peaks, some of which reached 13,000 feet. He had simply missed them by a combination of instinct and sheer luck.

When the right motor conked out, both Gyp and Joe Dobson knew that their luck had held out long enough. That from here on it was all against them. The plane limped on, losing altitude and bucking a cross wind. Suddenly the wind went mad with fury. The plane was caught in a savage updraft and shaken as an angry child shakes a toy, and they were plunged into thick cumulus that could not possibly have formed under prevailing weather conditions. The positive altimeter showed 3000 feet one moment and 9000 feet the next.

Gyp gave the signal and Joe stumbled back to the cabin to see that the passengers were securely belted. Perkins and Grass were white-faced and tense with helplessness. Father Pierre had his eyes closed. His lips were moving. Joe could think of nothing reassuring to say. When the plane tilted far to the left, straining and shuddering, and went into a lazy dive, he knew this was it. He tried to reach Caroline Brindle. She was gripping a panting dachshund under each arm. The last thing he saw was her green eyes, hard and brilliant. . . .

VII.

JOE felt numb and drowsily comfortable. He was lying on something warm and soft. Faintly at first, then growing stronger, the scent of roses was wafted on a soft breeze. A bird was singing. Joe breathed a little, cautiously. The air was fragrant and warm. A delicious sense of righteousness and well being stole over him.

"So this is Heaven!" he murmured. "Never thought I'd make it."

Something cool nuzzled his cheek and breathed in his ear. He opened his eyes and gazed into the inquisitive eyes of a dachshund.

"My Go— I mean, my goodness! Did you get in, too?" He inquired.

The dachshund kissed him.

"Sweetness and light," mumbled Joe beatifically. "All is sweetness and light. Let me see—'Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as 'tis in Heaven.' Uh—'as 'tis in Heaven—' "

"Feeling better?" asked Gyp.

"I'm feeling wonderful," said Joe. "Isn't it lovely that you made it, too. Do you remember what comes after 'on earth as 'tis in Heaven?' "

"Hell!" said Gyp. "He's out of his head. Must be a fracture."

Startled and shocked, Joe opened his eyes. Blurrily he saw Gyp kneeling

beside him. Caroline Brindle stood at Gyp's shoulder. She was wearing a white blouse and slacks, and the warm breeze stirred her chestnut bronze hair.

Father Pierre moved into Joe's vision. He was still wearing heavy breeches and boots, but he was in his shirt sleeves.

"How is he? Coming out of it?" asked Father Pierre.

"I don't know," answered Gyp. "He looks like he's awake but he's been muttering nonsense."

"Of course," said Father Pierre understandingly. "So did we all mutter nonsense at first. This place—The Valley of the Big Smoke—it's incredible. Joe, can you hear me?"

"Yes, Father," quavered Joe.

"There, you see. He's all right. Everything is all right, Joe. Let me explain it to you." Father Pierre spread his arms to indicate the space around him. He said: "This is a tropical valley, only a few degrees from the Arctic Circle. It is heated by boiling springs which sometimes cause clouds of steam to rise high above it. The Indians named it Valley of the Big Smoke. It is impossible to reach it by land. We are probably the first humans to set foot in the valley. Now do you begin to understand?" *

* These steam heated valleys actually exist in Northwest Canada though not much is known about them because of their inaccessibility. First hand reports have trickled out from time to time, however, and at least one scientific expedition has visited the area and brought back authentic reports of the tropical valley they discovered. The valley was reported to contain a rank growth of delphinium, raspberries, roses, etc. Crops of potatoes, onions and tobacco have been grown in one of the valleys. In another were found a great many smooth, spherical stones like marbles, one-half to three inches in diameter, all sorted into separate areas according to size. The mystery and fascination of exploring these strange valleys will undoubtedly draw many post-war tourists to that section of Canada through which the Alcan Highway now runs.

SOURCE: *Saturday Evening Post,* July 22, 1944.

"I guess so, Father. Thanks." Joe closed his eyes painfully. Now that he knew he was still attached to earth, his head had begun to hurt.

"HE'LL be all right if we keep him quiet," said Father Pierre. "The only thing we can do is keep cold cloths on his head. But I think he's entitled to a shot of morphine, don't you?"

"Certainly," replied Gyp. "If we can allow Perkins a shot for a dislocated shoulder, then Joe is definitely entitled to one. When the supplies are used up, they'll simply be gone, and that's that."

Father Pierre rummaged in the first aid kit. "At least there appears to be an abundance of food growing here," he said. "And once the radio is repaired—"

"If it can be repaired," said Gyp. He gazed across the lush valley. It was dim and misty, like a cloudy day in a warm latitude, but it looked to Gyp like a secret paradise. If he could have found this place alone. . . .

He sighed and turned his thoughts away from the possibilities. He knew he would have to make an effort to get his passengers out of here. A private paradise was not for him. He lifted his head at the unexpected smell of smoke.

A short distance away Caroline was moving expertly about a small camp fire, the dachshunds scampering after her. Farther off the plane rested on one broken wing, the nose crumpled against a grassy mound. He helped Father Pierre administer the shot, and stood up thoughtfully. The priest closed the kit and stood beside him, surveying the valley enthusiastically.

"We are probably," he said, "among the most fortunate people in the world. We fly out of a blizzard and land safely in Eden, where we have everything we

want."

"Everything," said Gyp ironically, "except peace. The antagonism and suspicion already existing among us will probably build up into something nasty before we've been here very long. I may as well warn you to expect trouble in paradise, Father."

"I wondered why you and Joe Dobson were wearing pistols," said the priest. "That—uh, incident I heard about last night was not just a rumor then?"

"We were shot at," said Gyp flatly. "That's why Joe is in such bad shape right now. He caught one that sliced the side of his head. His cap saved him, but he was a hospital case when we took off."

"Good heavens! You mean Perkins or the other man was shooting at you?"

"At us or at Miss Brindle. We were all together. I don't know who did the shooting, or why. And I don't say Perkins or Grass had anything to do with it, but the suspicion is there just the same. Any little thing is liable to bring it out into the open, and from then on we'll be having our own private little war."

"We must try to work it out," said Father Pierre philosophically. "All human relations have a key, you know. I shouldn't worry too much about it if I were you. I see our hostess has prepared some of that amazing powdered coffee, and what look like flapjacks. That ought to set us up in great shape to explore our valley. Come along, Gyp. Who knows what we may discover?"

CHAPTER VIII

NIGHT came swiftly to the valley. Gyp climbed out of the plane and stood for a moment, savoring the eerie melancholy of a lost land. Mournful bird notes echoed remotely, and the rank growth of the valley saturated the air with a heavy hothouse odor. The surrounding mountains had retreated in thick dusk, giving the illusion of an endless, timeless place, far removed from the human world.

A small body hurled itself out of the long grass, bounced off his legs with a shrill bark, and made an enthusiastic examination of his feet. Satisfied, it sat back on limp haunches, panting happily, one velvet ear turned inside out. Gyp regarded the dog with a frown of annoyance. It did not belong here—in his valley. It had no place in the wild, uncultured life teeming all about them, and it was an unpleasant reminder of his responsibilities.

The dog yipped at him again, demanding attention like a spoiled child. Gyp thrust out a foot and pushed it aside as he stepped away from the plane. Delighted, the dog snarled playfully, rushed at his ankle and attempted to hang on as he walked. Gyp continued to push it aside absently at every other step. As he approached the site of the camp fire, he was confronted by an outraged fury.

"Captain Anger! Don't you dare kick that dog again! We all know what a hateful swine you are, but you needn't take it out on a helpless little animal!"

"Then keep your helpless animal out from under my feet."

"Here, Petty! Come to mother, precious girl. Petty! Come here!"

Petty continued to emit ferocious growls as she attempted to devour Gyp's boots. Gyp lifted one foot.

"Don't you dare, damn you!" choked Caroline.

"Stop acting like an outraged mother!" snapped Gyp. "The silly dog doesn't seem to mind being brutally kicked around. If you haven't anything else to do, you might make your-

self useful by whipping up a meal of some kind."

She gasped angrily as Gyp passed her and went toward the tangled rose bower where Joe was sleeping. Petty went along, snapping happily at his heels.

Joe woke with a muffled groan as the dog nuzzled his ear. Gyp knelt and examined his battered head with gently probing fingers.

"You don't need to be so damn careful," muttered Joe. "It's not cracked."

Gyp grunted and sat back on his heels. The dog planted herself importantly between his knees, and regarded Joe with quizzical interest.

"Better give me the worst of it first," said Joe thickly.

"You're the worst of it," Gyp told him. "Perkins has a dislocated shoulder, Grass is shaken up a little. They're both sleeping it off. The rest of us are okay."

"I don't know how the hell you did it. Anything left of the plane?"

"Both props are gone, one engine wrecked, and a wing smashed. I'm leaving the radio for you to tinker with."

"I'll get right at it," Joe mumbled. "I wish I had a—"

"You'll have to ask Perkins for a drink," said Gyp flatly. "The only liquor on board belongs to him."

"That buzzard!" growled Joe. "That murderous son of a—"

"We don't know that!" snapped Gyp. "We can't afford to take sides in this thing. We've got to keep our heads. There'll be plenty of trouble without going out of our way to look for it."

"Says you!" muttered Joe. "Wait till they take a shot at you. Where's Carrie?"

"She's able to take care of herself," answered Gyp shortly, getting to his feet. "I'll bring you something to eat as soon as it's ready."

"I'm not hungry," said Joe fretfully. "How long will the emergency rations hold out?"

"We have a good deal more than emergency rations. Perkins and Grass brought along a big shipment of fancy groceries. We'll be able to live very well for a few weeks. And Father Pierre claims we can eat some of the stuff that's growing wild all around us."

"Damnedest thing I ever heard of!" grunted Joe. "You have to fall into the place to believe it. Summer resort in the Arctic! Damn silly if you ask me. But that's you. Always pulling off the impossible. Couldn't happen to anybody else. Why the hell you're wasting your time as a bush pilot—And that's another thing! I want to get *that* little detail straightened out. That letter I wrote—"

"I told you to skip it!" said Gyp curtly. "What the hell has your correspondence got to do with this situation?" He walked away without waiting for an answer. The dachshund gave Joe a final sympathetic swipe, and went galloping after him.

FATHER PIERRE was seated on a packing case, giving an enthusiastic account of his explorations to Caroline. A fire was burning efficiently inside a circle of rocks. Caroline was opening a can of soup.

"Gyp!" The priest jumped up excitedly. "I wish you could have been with me. This place is magnificent. Boiling springs, jack rabbits, wild onions—and look!" He reached into a pocket and held out a handful of overripe berries. "Raspberries—think of it! There are any number of roots and herbs growing here which I am unable to classify with any degree of accuracy, but I'll collect samples to take back with me. What do you think?"

"I think you'd better not plan on going back too soon," answered Gyp dryly. "Getting out of here will take some doing. Don't set your hopes too high."

The priest grinned engagingly, refusing to be discouraged.

"Hope," he said, "is the father of accomplishment."

Gyp was eyeing the small pan of soup Caroline placed on the fire. "Do you think that's going to be enough?" he asked. "There are six of us, you know."

"That's your concern, Captain, not mine," said Caroline haughtily. "I have no interest in you or the rest of your passengers."

"This is no time to display your well-developed temperament," snapped Gyp. "We're all in this together. The food supplies will have to be rationed. I want one person to handle it. If you can't do it, I'll give the job to somebody else."

"I think perhaps the soup was intended for our invalid, wasn't it, Miss Brindle?" said Father Pierre placatingly. "The rest of us can wait. Is Joe awake yet? Miss Brindle tells me he slept quietly all afternoon."

"He's awake," said Gyp gruffly. "He'll be all right in a day or two."

"I'm sure he will," said the priest cheerfully. "I expect I'd better step over and see how the other two are coming along. Will you look after the commissary while I'm gone, Miss Brindle, or would you prefer to have me take over? I'm perfectly willing, but I'm afraid I'm not the best cook in the world. My Indian friends have spoiled me. They claim I'd ruin any meal I had a hand in, but I think they exaggerate. I think I'd like to try a few little experiments. Here," he picked up a handful of poisonous looking bulbs. "I've brought back some wild onions. You see? I think I might find something to build a stew around them. They should be very tasty."

"They should be, Father, but they're not," said Caroline dryly. "They're much too strong. Your stew would be pretty rank."

"Oh." Father Pierre looked his disappointment. "Maybe the Indians are right. Maybe you—"

"All right, Father," said Caroline quietly. "You win. I can't bear the thought of any one trying to eat one of your stews." She looked at Gyp coldly. "If I'm to take care of the food, Captain Anger, I'll want no interference—from you or any one else."

"If you do it as well as I think you should," returned Gyp, "you'll get no interference. I'll see to that."

SHE turned abruptly, removed the pan of soup from the fire, and poured it into a large tin cup. From a battered fiber box she produced a tin plate, a handful of crackers and a large silver flask, and moved purposefully toward Joe's rose bower.

At sight of the flask, Gyp made a gesture of protest, but Father Pierre touched his arm, and murmured, "No. Let him have it. I'm sure he needs it. She knows what she's doing."

"I hope you're right," said Gyp morosely. "We could stand a little of that cooperation you mentioned, but I doubt if we'll get it. Too many conflicting personalities. If you're going to act as arbitrator, you'll have your hands full."

"No doubt," said Father Pierre wryly. "I'll try to be as neutral as possible, and hope that my faith in human nature is not too badly shaken. I don't believe it will be."

"Your optimism is beautiful," Gyp remarked bitterly. "And impractical."

"Yes, isn't it," agreed Father Pierre complacently. "But then I can afford beautiful and impractical things. I think I shall go and test my extravagant

optimism on the disgruntled Mr. Perkins. He should be awake and anxious to air his complaints by this time."

Gyp gazed thoughtfully after the dumpy little figure of the priest as he made his way through the tall grass and disappeared in tangled growth where vines and bushes struggled with one another for living space. Beyond that miniature jungle a sulphur spring had built a cone-shaped receptacle for its warm waters, and overflowing formed a small rill of crystal clear water. Caroline had made her first camp fire where the stream emerged from the heavy undergrowth, and Gyp had removed most of the plane's cargo to the spot. He was tired and hungry, but a troubled mind would not let him rest.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Caroline returned Gyp was building a rock dam under the critical supervision of Petty, who had to be restrained from wading out to test each rock as it was put in place.

There was a muttered imprecation and sounds of straining and bumping from the fire. Gyp glanced over his shoulder and leaped to his feet. Caroline was wrestling with a tottering stock of packing cases. Gyp reached her side in time to catch the box toppling from above, but she ignored him and went on struggling with the bottom crate.

"If you'll tell me what the devil you're trying to do—" Gyp began in exasperation.

Caroline steadied herself and lifted a face red with exertion. "You were much too busy paddling in the brook," she panted. "I wouldn't think of disturbing you!"

"Oh, stop it," said Gyp wearily. "I suppose you want that one. It would have to be the one on the bottom."

"Naturally," retorted Caroline coldly. She stood aside as Gyp methodically reduced the pile, pulled out the bottom crate, and ripped off the top. The contents were canned beef stew. He handed her two cans.

"Now what else do you want?"

"Nothing. You can run away and amuse yourself until your dinner is ready. But I wish you'd choose some other place, instead of muddying up the water when I want to use it."

"You'll have all the water you want in a few minutes," said Gyp patiently. "As soon as I've finished, you can draw water without having to dredge the bottom to get a cupful. This situation isn't any more pleasant for me than it is for you. Why don't you try to be more—"

"More congenial?" She laughed harshly. "With you? Impossible!"

"I was about to say cooperative," said Gyp tonelessly. "And not only with me—with all of us. It shouldn't be too hard to turn on your professional charm, and it might set the rest of us a good example."

She laughed again, and stared at him with insolent cat eyes. "You intrigue me, Captain. After all the situation does have interesting possibilities, doesn't it? Being marooned with five men is something that doesn't happen to every lone female."

Gyp turned away with a look of tired disgust and went back to his dam building. Deep night had fallen and the valley was ghostly still, until presently voices and the beams of a flashlight announced the return of Father Pierre with Perkins and Grass. Gyp finished his work and inspected it in the light of his own flash. When the small reservoir had filled with clear water, he dipped up a pailful and carried it back to the fire.

The effect of Father Pierre's missionary work was immediately apparent.

The men were obviously in much better spirits. Perkins, with his left arm in a sling, was half reclining against a packing case, propped up with pillows and blankets. He was enjoying a cigar, while Grass acted as bartender.

"Bring your cup over and join us, Captain," called Grass, lifting the bottle of bonded bourbon.

Gyp picked up one of the two remaining tin cups in the fiber box, and glanced at Caroline. She was standing beside the fire, a remote, veiled look on her face, completely oblivious of her surroundings.

"Would you care for a drink, Miss Brindle?" Gyp asked.

After a moment she turned a malicious grin in his direction. "No, thank you," she said with ironic emphasis.

PERKINS eyed Gyp blandly as he approached. His good humor restored, he was once more the forceful executive, in spite of his injury.

"Good evening, Captain." His smile was that of a game fellow, overcoming pain by sheer will power. "The good padre tells me you have seen fit to confiscate my supplies. Not that I'd have objected, of course, but I should have liked to be consulted."

"It didn't seem like a good time to stand on ceremony," said Gyp. "Naturally I'm responsible for all of you, and I intend to take whatever steps are necessary for your welfare."

"I don't believe it will be necessary for you to assume the entire burden," said Perkins tolerantly. "As the padre explains it, you discharged a large part of your responsibility by bringing us down safely. 'Miraculous,' the padre called it." He chuckled patronizingly. "I haven't much faith in miracles, but I will admit it was a magnificent combination of skill and luck. I think you are to be congratulated." He lifted his cup in a limp salute.

"Thanks," said Gyp, downing the mellow bourbon. As Grass offered the bottle once more he shook his head and hooked a thumb in his belt, the tin cup dangling from one finger. He waited patiently for Perkins' next ultimatum. It came, almost exactly as anticipated.

"Fortunately," said Perkins, "with my experience—roughing it in the field, you know—and with Grass conveniently at hand to assist me, I believe I can organize things for our best interests and comfort."

"I'm glad to hear it," Gyp told him gravely. "As Father Pierre has already remarked, cooperation is essential, and I'll be only too glad to listen to whatever suggestions any of you may care to make. Miss Brindle has agreed to take charge of the culinary department. I'm sure she'll be able to handle it without any difficulty; but if there *should* happen to be any complaints, you're to bring them to me, and I'll see that some satisfactory adjustment is made. And the same goes for any other differences that may arise."

Perkins' amiable expression had changed to a blank poker face. He handled his cigar cautiously, like a man whose safe bet had been unexpectedly doubled, and who couldn't decide whether to call the bet or raise the ante.

Grass took the pressure off by remarking casually, "I don't envy you your self-appointed task, Captain. People are apt to revert to the primitive when they are suddenly cast out of a civilized existence; and primitives, of course, resent a single authority. I believe Perkins' idea of sharing responsibility, each according to his talents, was a wise one. Especially since you and your co-pilot will be kept pretty busy with mechanical details. You do intend to repair the radio, don't you?"

"Certainly," replied Gyp. "I've al-

ready delegated that job to my co-pilot. He happens to be the radio expert in our crew."

Grass poured himself another drink, smiling crookedly. "And being the boss-man of a two man crew, you feel that qualifies you to act as dictator of a small community thrown together by accident rather than careful selection?"

"That remains to be seen," Gyp answered equably. "In a small group of rugged individualists, a dictator can be much more efficient than the communal plan you were hinting at. Although I got the idea that even your plan proposed a kind of supervisor. Weren't you suggesting that each of us should assume the particular labor for which we are best fitted, and that Perkins' share in the scheme should be that of executive administrator?"

"At least he has had experience in administration," declared Grass stiffly. "I think," said Father Pierre's mild voice from the shadows, "that we are becoming politically involved, even before our community is established. It looks as though our hostess is ready to serve our first dinner in paradise—without benefit of politics. Shall we join her?"

THE scanty dinner of beef stew, crackers, canned peaches and coffee was eaten in a surly silence, lightened only by Father Pierre's extravagant praise of the unwilling cook. Gyp kept a wary eye out for the persistent Petty, certain that she would endeavor to share his plate; but the two dogs sat by, watchfully polite, until Gyp rose and went to the fire for a second cup of coffee. As if at a signal, both dogs leaped after him, barking expectantly for the tidbits they thought would be forthcoming. They bounded against him and tangled themselves around his legs as he tried to pour the coffee.

"Down!" he shouted, pushing at the writhing bodies with his foot.

"Perry!" Caroline's voice was sharp and clear, and its effect was startling.

The coffee pot clattered into the fire as Gyp, electrified, jerked about with clenched fists and stood there glaring at her, hot coffee dripping off his arms and staining the front of his tunic.

The silence held for a long moment. Even the dogs were still. Father Pierre sighed and turned his eyes away from the tableau.

"Perry," said Perkins softly. He sat forward slowly, his eyes puffed slits in the firelight. "So that's who you are! Hillis Jepson Perry—escaped murderer and thief! I knew there was something wrong about you. And alias-Carrie-Brindle knew all about it. Too bad she had to give you away."

"I didn't know, damn you!" Caroline was almost sobbing. "That—that name . . . It's my dog's name. I named them Petty and—and Perry. I couldn't have known—"

"Nice going, lady, but it won't do," said Grass contemptuously. "It's all too pat and neat. You had to have an accomplice up here somewhere. And who could be a better one than a man already hiding out from the law, and needing a slice of that fortune you thought you could steal?"

"Miss Brindle has no connection whatever with me," said Gyp in a flat, tired voice. He turned and fished the coffee pot out of the fire, rinsed it and filled it with fresh water, and set it back on the coals.

"Well," declared Perkins, extracting a fresh cigar from his pocket. "I guess this throws a little different light on the picture. Whether Miss—ah, What's-her-name has any connection with you or not, Perry, I think you'll have to admit that we can hardly be expected to submit to your management of our

affairs."

CHAPTER X

GYP faced them without moving from the fire. His eyes reflected an icy glitter from the dancing flames, and there was cold menace in his hunched shoulders and loosely hung arms.

He said: "You can take your hand off that gun, Grass. You're not going to need it. And even if you did, I can shoot at least as well as you can—if that *was* you, trying to commit murder last night."

Grass said nothing, but his hand slid away from the shoulder holster and came out of his jacket empty. As if suddenly aware that he was the only one standing and opposing the dangerous looking man before him, he made a nonchalant effort to appear at ease while he quietly effaced himself by sidling toward Perkins and sinking down on a corner of the packing case. His nervous efforts to behave naturally defeated him, he missed the case and stumbled awkwardly against Perkins, who squawked shrilly and subsided, white-faced and tight-lipped.

"None of you is in a position to accuse any of the rest of us of anything, no matter what your suspicions may be," Gyp told them coldly. "We are as completely cut off from the world as if we had left the planet. Our chances of making contact with that world are slight, and even if we did, the problem of getting out of here still remains unsolved. We may be living here together for a long time. Several shots were exchanged in that little skirmish last night. All of you are suspect, and for that reason none of you can be trusted. As long as we remain here, one person will be in charge. I intend to be that person."

"Good God!" said Perkins fervently.

Father Pierre looked up from his thoughtful contemplation of the unfinished meal on his plate. "Would you like me to help you wash the dishes, Miss Brindle?" he asked gravely.

Caroline gazed at him uncomprehendingly. Her face was white and strained, and her eyes were still glassy with shock.

Perkins roused himself, and said: "Here, wait a minute! We can't let this go on. Father, do you know who this man is?"

"He is Captain Gyp Anger as far as I know," said the priest with calm indifference. "I have no reason to think otherwise."

Perkins' heavy face was red with suppressed anger. "You have my word for it, sir!" he stormed. "And I assure you I am not mistaken! If I had not been so concerned with my own difficulties, I might have guessed it long before this. If you had seen his pictures plastered on the front page of every daily in the United States, you'd know him too, in spite of the beard. And the name that went with those pictures was not 'Captain Gyp Anger,' it was Lieutenant-Colonel Hillis Jepson Perry, holder of the Congressional Medal and every other decoration they could crowd onto the front of his uniform. Oh, yes! A big-shot hero, that's what he was. Not a rag-tag roughneck, flying freight for a broken down, one-horse outfit in the wilds of nowhere."

"It sounds," said Father Pierre, "like a very fine recommendation for the person you have in mind."

"Don't strain your faith in human nature too far, Father," said Gyp bitterly. "You might exhaust it, and then where would you be?"

"Bankrupt," said Father Pierre promptly. "I'd simply have to start all over again."

"You, sir, are a fool!" said Perkins heavily.

"Thank you," said Father Pierre. "The most spectacular saints were the greatest fools; but I'm afraid I shall always fall far short of the heights of foolishness they attained."

"Is there no reasoning with you?" demanded Perkins.

"On what premise *are* you reasoning, sir? Whether I am a fool? Or whether that man is a hero? Or whether your word is sufficient to judge a man?"

"I am trying to tell you," said Perkins with elaborate care, "just who that man is, and what he has done, in order to convince you that our lives are in danger every moment he remains free and armed."

Gyp unfolded his arms and stepped away from the fire. Both Perkins and Grass watched him warily as he seated himself at a strategic distance, pulled up his knees, and lighted a cigarette.

Grass leaned down and spoke softly to Perkins.

"No, by God!" shouted Perkins. "I'll tell it here and now, and right to his face, if it costs me my life! What good will pussyfooting do now that he's been identified? I'm trying to tell you," he lowered his voice to a tense monotone as he addressed the priest, but kept an eye on Gyp, "how he traded on his popularity as a war hero to defraud innocent investors of $7,000,000. How he quarreled with his partner, who was also his father-in-law, and shot the old man through the head when an investigation was about to reveal that his American Rocket Plane Corporation was nothing but a racket. Yes, a racket instead of a rocket!"

HE PAUSED momentarily, but Gyp said nothing. His lean, bearded face remained impassive as he watched the smoke rising steadily from his cigarette.

"They built one plane," Perkins went on carefully. "It performed beautifully on low level flights, but no better than propeller-driven planes. Its real purpose was supposed to be high-altitude, high-speed flight. On its first altitude test, the plane exploded. They're still picking up the pieces. No part of the two men in the plane was ever found. The investors' funds had been squandered. God knows on what! Certainly it wasn't on development of the plane. And the famous hero had vanished! Do you think that fallen hero is going to allow us to take him back to civilization to stand trial for his crimes? Do you, Father? Wouldn't it be simpler to liquidate the lot of us here in this hidden valley?"

"Assuming that all your assumptions are correct," said the priest mildly, "I still cannot answer that question, since I have not been favored with the gift of prophecy."

"Why are you defending this man!" raged Perkins.

"I was not aware that I was defending any one. I thought I was being thoroughly impartial. Let him defend himself if he feels that your charges warrant a defense."

"I don't," said Gyp coldly.

Perkins flung down his dead cigar as if it were a grim challenge. "Your refusal to back me up," he told the priest vindictively, "can have only one result. We must live in a state of armed tension, expecting a bullet in the back at any moment."

"Not necessarily," said Father Pierre. "If everybody relinquished their artillery there would be no need for any shooting."

"The simple solution of a simple soul," said Grass derisively. "Do you seriously think we would give up our only protection against a two-legged

killer, to say nothing of the wild life in this place?"

"From my observations," said Father Pierre, "I should say that there is nothing more savage than a jackrabbit living in the valley."

"If your observations of wild life are on a par with your other observations," said Perkins, "I shouldn't care to trust them. I prefer to rely on my own instincts. For that reason Grass and I will keep watch in turns through the night. Any one approaching our camp will be shot without notice."

On this note of warning, Perkins got up with the help of Grass, and retired with an air of injured dignity, leaving Grass to struggle with the pillows and blankets while covering their rear. The retreat was not as effective as it might have been. Grass could not quite equal the iron nerve of his employer, and once he reached the tangled underbrush, his troubles increased, and the dignified retreat became a nervous rout.

CHAPTER XI

FATHER PIERRE shook his head commiseratingly and got to his feet. "Well, we may as well clean up the kitchen, Miss Brindle," he said briskly. "I expect we'll all be glad to turn in early tonight. It's been an adventuresome day, hasn't it?"

Caroline made no answer as she began to gather the plates and cups. All vivacity seemed to have left her, and she went about the task with a forlorn air of utter weariness.

"Miss Brindle," said Gyp sharply, "have you decided where you're going to sleep?"

"I'll sit up with Joe," she answered without looking at him.

"Don't be ridiculous!" he snapped. "Nobody expects you to be a martyr. You've already taken on a full time job. If you're afraid, you can barricade yourself inside the plane."

"I'm not afraid!" she flashed at him defiantly. "I'm staying near Joe in case he needs me. You seem to forget he's badly hurt, and a long ways from the nearest hospital!"

"Why don't you two stop your bickering?" demanded Father Pierre with a sudden display of anger. "There is enough conflict here without that. I wish you would either kiss and make up, or else quit speaking to each other altogether!"

They gaped at him in startled amazement, then Gyp relaxed and grinned mirthlessly. "It seems that all our tempers are on edge tonight," he said. "But cheer up, Father. Tomorrow is another day, with bigger and better problems."

Caroline finished her chores in silence, gathered up her dogs and a flashlight and strode off into the black night without a word.

Gyp spread his blankets near the fire, and after a prayerful session, Father Pierre followed suit, remarking as he pulled off his boots, "You do like to tempt the devil, don't you?"

"In what way?" asked Gyp.

"If any one should wish to eliminate you," said the priest, "you have chosen the most conveniently exposed spot in the valley to fall asleep—beside a fire."

"And what about you, Father?" asked Gyp mockingly. "Are you here to help me tempt the devil, or merely shoo him away?"

"If he comes," said the priest grumpily, "I shall probably wake up too late to do anything. Good night, Gyp." He sighed prodigiously. "And God keep you."

"God and my roscoe," said Gyp carelessly. "Sleep well, Father. There won't be any disturbance tonight."

He was wrong about that, as he soon

discovered. In spite of his careless attitude, he was deeply in trouble. But he had learned to hide his inner turmoil behind an impassive exterior, trusting no man, knowing that his strongest defense was a cold, hard attitude of aggressiveness. Joe Dobson's friendly curiosity had broken through that defense once, and to silence that curiosity, Gyp had admitted only that he was in the Northwest wilderness because he was a fugitive from justice. The result of that small admission, he had already experienced, to his angry regret. Now he found himself in the shaky position of trying to keep the upper hand with a group of people whose suspicions and fears flared openly. The future was black and uncertain as the dark valley night, but for the time being his only safety lay in a tough ruthlessness, and a willingness to employ any means to keep his companions cowed.

HE WAS weary to the point of exhaustion, but sleep would not come, and he lay there staring into the shadows cast by the dying fire, until his eyes began to play tricks on him and there was motion in the darkness. Motion of things that were not there. He closed his eyes and tried to relax, and then he heard the gentle, slithering sound somewhere near. His fingers touched the gun butt and slid firmly around it as he lay tense and still. The next moment the breath went out of him with an angry gasp. Petty crept out of the tall grass and sidled against him gently, her tail beating soft applause.

Gyp grasped the wriggling body in his hands, climbed stiffly to his feet and marched a little way into the blackness.

"Miss Brindle!" he called sharply, and she appeared almost instantly. "Keep this confounded animal tied up, I don't want—"

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" she snapped. "My dogs are not hurting any one by walking around. If you're so fussy, why don't you follow your own suggestion and barricade yourself in your plane?"

"Nobody's being fussy!" shouted Gyp. "I damn near shot her when she—"

"By all the devils and Beelzebub!" bellowed Father Pierre. "Are you two at it again? Can't a man get any . . ." His voice faded in the night as Caroline snatched the dog out of Gyp's hands and ran stumbling into the dark.

When Gyp returned to the smoldering fire, there was no sign of the priest. The only sound in the sudden stillness was a sharp whack and a surprised yelp from a dog unaccustomed to punishment.

In a little while Father Pierre came padding out of the shadows in his stocking feet. He looked at Gyp out of round, sleepy eyes without saying anything, but his cherubic face was worried as he walked to the half-filled water bucket and emptied it on the red coals.

"What's the matter?" asked Gyp's voice in the total blackout.

"The little dog was not the only visitor," said Father Pierre. "But perhaps neither one meant to disturb us. Perhaps it was only curiosity."

"Charitable of you," said Gyp tightly. "You'd better take care that your own curiosity doesn't lead you into a trap."

Father Pierre subsided once more on his blankets. The valley had become damp and chill and he rustled and burrowed for a moment making himself comfortable. "Good night again," he said in a muffled voice, "God keep you—and me, too."

Gyp rolled into his own blankets

with a weary sigh. Oddly enough the brief disturbance had served to loosen the tension and he was able to push all his worries aside as futile, since the element of chance played such a part in anything that might take place. He was drifting into a vague dream of flight over iridescent mountains when a small slender body once more slid against his thigh and roused him.

"Now, God damn it!" he breathed hoarsely.

The dog inched herself along his side until her head rested on his shoulder, her tail thumping uncertainly in a bid for sympathy.

"Oh, hell!" said Gyp. "All right."

The tail whipped a brief tattoo of thankfulness and the long body went limp against him with a sigh of contentment. All the tautness went out of Gyp and he sank into a deep and dreamless sleep. After all a watch dog could be useful, and would never ask unpleasant questions . . .

CHAPTER XII

EVEN Father Pierre had to admit that the next few days in paradise were not exactly idyllic, or even comfortable. Contrary to all meteorologic tables for that latitude, it rained. Starting with a fine mist on the second day, it ranged from sudden brief downpours to a steady, dismal drip that went on for hours, thoroughly soaking everything.

Inadequate hut shelters were constructed from packing cases and brush. The canned goods was sorted and most of it carried back to the plane. Caroline struggled endlessly with her fire until Gyp and Father Pierre built a shelter over that, and then she battled the smoke from wet brushwood. With Joe's recovery, however, her spirits seemed to rise, and the meals improved in spite of the cantankerous fire.

Because their activities were dictated by necessity, rather than any orders from Gyp, there was no open rebellion against his authority. Perkins and Grass both maintained a sullen, watchful silence, speaking only with each other when they joined the company at mealtimes. Otherwise they proved thoroughly capable of looking after themselves.

Gyp's stern determination to maintain a cold, impersonal attitude received a jolt when he talked to Joe on the morning of the second day. In spite of his weakness Joe had insisted upon getting up and making his way to the plane on wobbly legs. His preliminary examination of the wreckage was not encouraging. He sank into the pilot's seat and lit a cigarette with shaking fingers.

"Maybe it won't look so bad," he said hoarsely, "when I feel a little better. I guess I'm pretty rocky this morning."

"No hurry," said Gyp curtly. "As long as the food holds out, and nobody starts throwing bullets, we'll live."

"Gyp, about that—what happened last night," said Joe carefully. "You've got to believe that neither Carrie nor I had anything to do with it. She really did name the dog Perry."

"It was no surprise to you, was it?" asked Gyp flatly. "You knew."

"Sure. I knew. Hells fire, man! How could I help knowing? I've been with you night and day for six months. Do you think a beard and a funny name can cover up a personality like yours?" He coughed raggedly. "But I wasn't selling you out, Gyp, when I wrote that letter."

"No, of course not. You were just tipping off a reporter to a good story," said Gyp indifferently. "Well, I hope

your friend Finchley isn't disappointed. I hope he gets credit for trying, even if they don't get me."

"He'll get credit all right, but not for what you think," said Joe. "You see, I don't believe you did it."

"You what?"

"I don't think you killed that guy—your father-in-law. And I don't think you copped all that dough that disappeared."

"You crazy fool!" said Gyp harshly.

"Yeah? I suppose you think I'm the only guy in the world with that idea? Maybe I am—except for you. Because you know damn well you didn't shoot him. Somebody else did. Or maybe he shot himself, because the rocket ship you were promoting turned out to be a fizzle. Because the whole thing was a bubble, cooked up by a crooked brain to make a fortune in a hurry off the investors." Joe coughed shakily "The thing is, whoever cooked up the scheme, it wasn't you. Hell! If you gripe over carrying a $5,000 load of furs that you think might be stolen, how the devil could you make off with seven million bucks?"

"That's not hard to do."

"Oh, bull feathers! You rushed that test plane through because you were sold on it yourself. If you'd been in on the crooked stuff, you'd have sat back and let the money roll in. And you'd have kept postponing an altitude test for one reason or another. You trusted somebody else with the secret construction, and let them use you to make the thing look good." Joe dragged on his cigarette, choked, and added weakly, "Don't tell me!"

GYP stood there for a long moment, fists clenched in his pockets. "I wish," he said in a tired voice, "you had told me all this before you wrote to your Johnny Finchley. You see—I don't want the thing cleared up. I want it left just as it is."

"On account of your wife," said Joe. "Oh, hell! Don't look at me like that. As long as I've said this much, I might as well say the rest of it. In plain words, she ratted on you. She got out of it with a neat little fortune of her own that the investors can't touch, instead of sticking by you. She must have known you didn't shoot her old man, but did she come forward and say so? No, she let the evidence of the servants stand as it was. That you had a violent quarrel with the old man, and afterwards he was found dead. You sure must crave punishment, brother! You're the biggest sucker I've ever known!"

"All right," said Gyp. "All right, let it go. It's my worry—after we get out of here."

"That's if we do," said Joe morosely. "Meanwhile you've got those two stinkers on your hands. If you can hold 'em off till I get on my feet again, we'll take 'em both."

"No!" said Gyp sharply. "There'll be no bloodshed here if I can help it. Once it starts, it'll mean a fight to the finish. We'll all wind up dead. No sense in killing off innocent people. If you want to be helpful, the best thing you can do is drop all your suspicions and play up to anybody that gives you an opening."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You don't seem to have any trouble getting along with Father Pierre or Miss Brindle. But I've got a hunch that Perkins or Grass may try to get around you. Give them the chance. The friendlier everybody is, the better off we'll all be. But don't try to get too chummy with me. I've got to stay strictly impersonal with everybody."

"Yeah." Joe sighed glumly. "I get it. I'm supposed to go over to the

enemy's camp to keep things from busting wide open. Okay, if you say so, but Carrie's not going to like it."

"That's unfortunate," said Gyp grimly. "I'm afraid there'll be a good many things she won't like. This isn't Park Avenue."

"Hell, she knows that," said Joe in surprise. "Carrie's regular as they come. You couldn't ask for a better—"

"All right. Just do what you can to keep everybody happy. Look at that mist! It's almost heavy enough to be rain."

"Hell, it *is* rain!" said Joe. "This can't be sixty degrees North. Are you sure you didn't drop us all the way through to South America?"

"It's not so unnatural, with the heavy snowfall all around us," observed Gyp. "We'd better pick up our blankets and everything else that can't stand a soaking. This may go on indefinitely."

CHAPTER XIII

"DEAR ME," said Father Pierre, slapping at his face. "Who would ever imagine it would be necessary to carry mosquito netting and citronella oil on this trip?"

"Give the little devils a break, Father," laughed Joe. "Their breed never had a good man to feast on before."

"They won't be so bad when it stops raining," said Caroline. "If it stops, that is."

"Sing it, honey," said Joe, reaching into one of the packing cases that served as the kitchen cupboard, and lifting out a guitar.

Caroline tuned it and began strumming lazily with a throbbing blues beat. Then she was singing "Stormy Weather." Her voice had the smooth quality and effortless range of a fine violin, and she had a trick of emphasis and timing that held the attention of listeners.

The group was gathered under the slanting roof of the cook shed. Having finished an excellent dinner of roast chicken, canned vegetable salad and apple pie, they were sitting in somewhat sullen companionship. The melancholy, dripping night closed them in, emphasizing the discomfort of their enforced association.

Neither Father Pierre nor any one else offered Caroline compliments on her cooking any longer, because Perkins openly resented any reference to the use of his supplies. He invariably launched an argument about not being permitted to handle their rationing himself. He and Grass had managed to hide the stock of liquor in their hut and it was no longer freely offered before dinner. Nor did they feel obliged to offer any assistance in the chores of running the camp. Nevertheless Caroline managed meal times with surprising efficiency and smoothness, and every one appeared promptly with no urging or argument. Cooking facilities had been improved thanks to Joe and Father Pierre. Stripping metal from the plane, they had utilized the long rainy evenings to fashion a grill and a small camp oven.

During the short daylight hours Joe worked on the radio. He knew that once he had gotten through to Fort Simpson or Fort Laird, the news of their plight would instantly be known to the entire Northwest. The Northwest Territories and Yukon System kept a 24-hour vigil at the 19 wireless stations strung across hundreds of thousands of square miles, and contact with one was contact with all.

Meanwhile Gyp spent strenuous hours hacking a clearing in the center of the valley in anticipation of a rescue

plane when the fury of the blizzard had subsided. He received Joe's optimistic reports of progress with certain misgivings. How much, he wondered, did he owe these strangely assorted individuals? If the impossible happened, and their recue was effected, it meant quite simply that his own life was forfeited. He could not hope to escape indictment and conviction, in spite of Joe Dobson's belief in his innocence. As the days passed he grew more and more taciturn, drawing more and more apart from the others, except for the dog, Petty, who had attached herself firmly to his person in spite of the gloomy disapproval of her mate.

As Caroline's voice rose in nostalgic longing, Gyp got to his feet and stepped quietly into the dripping night, the dog at his heels.

"Can't go on . . ." The words of the song followed him tauntingly, disturbingly, touching emotions he had thought were dead.

Nor was he the only one who was disturbed by Caroline's songs. George Grass had begun to watch her furtively with a gleam of something other than animosity in his dark eyes, and a speculative expression about his thin mouth. Gyp was unreasonably annoyed by the expression. He went into the dark damp hut shared with Joe and Father Pierre, and sat there with hands clenched, his mind an unpleasant confusion of thoughts.

THE monotonous rainfall ceased, as it had begun, with slow stealth. It was two days before they realized that it had actually stopped, leaving the valley a steamy quagmire. Nevertheless, Father Pierre ventured forth on further explorations, armed only with a small notebook in which he jotted down "on the spot" details of his observations. Soon Grass and Perkins, whose shoulder had mended, followed his example. The valley was less than two miles long and averaged a half mile in width. Except for small hummocks, it was fairly flat, but the rank growth was almost impossible to penetrate.

On one occasion George Grass brought back a large rabbit which he had shot. Its fur was an unusually thick, pale creamy color. He skinned and cleaned it, and presented it to Caroline.

"Thought some fresh meat might taste good," he said with unaccustomed awkwardness.

"Thank you," said Caroline gravely. "I'll stew it."

The rabbit proved to be extremely tough and tasteless and Perkins immediately raised a complaint.

"What the devil is *this* God-awful mess?" he demanded, slamming down his plate. "I refuse to permit that woman to ruin any more of my supplies!"

"It's not the cook!" said Grass with unexpected harshness. "The damn rabbit was too tough to begin with, I had no business asking her to cook it."

Perkins glared at him in astonishment. "Oh, so?" His voice took on a nasty edge. "I see. Yes, I suppose that was to be expected. However, I'd advise you—"

"Save it!" snapped Grass. "I passed the age of consent some time ago."

Perkins glared at him a moment longer, then got up and stalked into his hut with a good deal of dignity.

"As if," said Joe, "he were going into executive conference with himself. We will doubtless be informed of his decision on form 234-G, revised, and will then act accordingly."

"The damn animal *is* pretty bad eating," said Grass with a wry grin. "I ought to have known better."

"Oh, it isn't that bad," Father Pierre said cheerfully. "I've had to eat far worse things that were cooked with far less skill."

"Thanks." Caroline and Grass spoke in unison, glanced at each other and quickly away in sudden embarrassment. But the incident served to create a more friendly attitude between Grass and Caroline, Joe, and Father Pierre. Gyp and Perkins continued to maintain a grim aloofness, and far from being pleased with the friendly atmosphere which he had asked Joe to promote, Gyp experienced an inexplicable resentment. He tried to tell himself that it was caused by uneasy suspicion that Grass was up to some trick, but he knew it was more personal than that. He grew daily more miserable, and more vulnerable.

All his carefully built defenses were in danger of crumbling on the day that Caroline's dog, Perry, disappeared. She searched for him all day, and at dusk Joe left his work on the plane and joined her. The others were seated in the cook shed where Father Pierre had served the inadequate evening meal of spam, cheese and crackers.

Perkins ate it, grumbling and trying to draw Gyp into an argument. Gyp refused to answer, and he noted that Grass too, was strangely silent, toying with his food and glancing out toward the sound of the search with moody preoccupation. Suddenly Caroline's voice cried out sharply, calling Joe's name in a voice that was hoarse with pain or terror. Gyp leaped to his feet, grabbed a flashlight and ran toward the sound of her voice.

She was kneeling in a tangle of raspberry vines, her face and arms scratched and her shirt torn by thorns. The dog lay there, his long, silky body twisted in the tortured attitude of violent and painful death. Gyp reached for the inquisitive Petty and clasped her under one arm as Joe came crashing through the tangle.

Joe took one look at the small, brown body and touched Caroline's hair. "I'm sorry, honey," he said huskily. "He's been poisoned. He must have eaten something—some grass or something, like dogs do, and it poisoned him. Come on, get up now. You mustn't let it get you. Here, I'll carry him—"

"But, Joe—" Her voice was choked with grief. "What am I going to do? He—he's all I've got left—"

"You still have this one," said Gyp harshly, feeling guilty about the dog he held so possessively. Petty was frightened and still, pressing her head against him and shivering.

Caroline lifted a white face and said hopelessly, "No. She's yours." She let Joe lead her back toward the camp.

Gyp stood there uncomfortably for a moment, his flashlight picking up the twisting trail where the dog had dragged himself through the grass in his death agony. On a sudden impulse he turned and followed the trail, still clutching Petty under his arm. The trail twisted and turned blindly for several feet until it reached the flat, bare top of a protruding rock. On the rock were several reddish, brown chunks of canned dog food. Gyp snapped off the flash and stood listening tensely. Petty whimpered softly and lifted her head. He swore briefly under his breath, and still holding the dog and shading the flashlight with one hand, he gathered up the meat chunks in his handkerchief, stuffed them in his pocket, and walked quickly back to camp.

CHAPTER XIV

JOE DOBSON was very drunk. He knew he was drunk, and he knew that he shouldn't be drunk. He tried

to remember how many days it had been since he started drinking. It seemed like a whole lot of days, but maybe it wasn't. Gyp ought to get him off this binge. Gyp never let him stay drunk more than a couple of days. But Gyp was gone. Gyp didn't live here any more.

Joe's head moved loosely, drunkenly on his neck as he looked about the dim, dank hut.

"Damn shame!" he said. "Gyp shouldna left this fine home." He reached an unsteady hand for the bottle. He was vaguely surprised to find it full. "'S a funny thing," he declared solemnly. "Bottle's always full. No matter how drunk I get . . . bottle's always full."

Outside the hut voices were raised in altercation.

"I tell you he won't let me near the damn plane!" said Grass angrily. "What do you expect me to do, get my head shot off?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Perkins coldly. "You'd be of no use to me with your head off. But I do expect you to use a little ingenuity. You've got to get at that radio. You've been bragging about how quickly you could get it to working. With Dobson out of the way, here's your chance."

"Out o' the way, he says," muttered Joe. "He means me. But I'll fool 'em. That's what. I'll . . . Wait a minute." He squinted thoughtfully, trying to concentrate. "That's my radio he's talkin' about. Nobody's gonna monkey with my radio 'cept me. An' anyway I already got it workin'. That's what I been sittin' here tryin' to remember! I gotta get on that bug an' start swingin'."

He lifted the bottle and drank deeply. The bottle slipped from his fingers as he lurched to his feet and staggered to the brush bed in one corner of the hut. . . .

In the plane Gyp removed the ear phones and stared into the creeping blackness of another night. For three days he had remained close to the plane, fighting a battle with himself. He had no doubt that the poison which killed the dog was used as an experiment, and that sooner or later an adequate dose would be prepared for him. A much slyer method than shooting, less dangerous to the killer. He did not risk his own neck with poison as he certainly would in a shooting match with Gyp. Nor would there be any proof against him when and if the party was rescued. The others, Gyp felt certain, were safe from the killer. Grass had made friends with Joe and Father Pierre, and they would be excellent witnesses against Gyp whether they wished to be or not. As for Caroline, Grass was quite obviously infatuated. If he had ever been willing to see her eliminated, he would not now stand for it. He had other plans for her.

Petty stood on her short hind legs and lifted her paws to his knee, whining gently to remind him that it was past her dinner-time. Gyp stroked her sleek head with one finger.

"All right, girl," he said, and his voice sounded harsh in the empty plane.

There was plenty of food in the plane, which he had eaten cold out of the cans. Father Pierre had voluntarily supplied water since the morning Gyp had gone to the plane, and remained there. The priest also brought news of the camp, but Gyp told him nothing in return. He knew that Joe was on a grand binge, and he reflected bitterly that it served his purpose very well. The binge had started on the night Caroline's dog was killed. Grass had broken out a bottle in an effort to cheer her up, and the next morning Joe was unconscious in a complete stupor.

KNOWING Joe would be in a state of incompetence all day, Gyp had gone to the plane himself to inspect the radio. He tested the engine which Joe had repaired and noted that the earphones wer pluggd in. He picked them up, and in a little while he was startled to hear his own call number. Faintly a voice kept inviting him to come in. Finally the voice identified itself as Ford Laird and said: "Come in Fort Simpson. Have you got any more from Gyp Anger?"

Gyp listened to the conversation about himself with a sense of shock. He realized what had happened. It had been his idea that Joe should report his progress on the radio privately. He felt that he might gain some small advantage if the others were kept in the dark. For that reason, Joe had not informed him immediately that the radio was working, intending to wait until he and Gyp were alone. But then the dog had been found, and Joe had started drinking . . .

Gyp got up stiffly and gave Petty her supper. He picked up a can of beans, looked at the label without seeing it, and put the can back without opening it. He returned to his seat beside the patchwork radio and took up his lonely vigil.

He sat there for a long time, long enough for the camp to be securely asleep. At last he picked up a heavy wrench and climbed out of the plane. Petty woke and tried to follow him. In order to keep her quiet, he climbed back and lifted her out. She scampered happily into the grass and Gyp went forward and pulled himself up to the repaired engine. In the dim light of a shaded flash he began to dismantle it. He set to work with determined swiftness, but gradually his movements slowed and then stopped, overcome with revulsion for the thing he was doing. Sweat was streaming down his face, and he clung there, suddenly hot and dizzy with exertion and the sickness sweeping through him.

Oddly, Joe's hoarse voice was croaking in his ears: "I don't believe you did it . . . I didn't sell you out . . . I don't believe you did it . . ."

"Oh, God!" he groaned aloud. "I can't do it!"

He dropped to the ground and stood there for a moment on shaking legs, breathing raggedly. Then he turned and came face to face with Caroline. In the misty glow of the flashlight she was smiling at him.

"It's all *right,* Gyp," she said softly.

He stood there for a long time staring at her while sick waves of shame burned through him.

"It's not all right," he said hoarsely. "I meant to wreck it. I meant to prevent you from ever getting out of here."

She continued to smile gently.

"Don't you understand?" he grated harshly. "I didn't intend to be found. I meant to sacrifice all of you, so that I—"

"I know." Her face didn't change and her voice was still gentle. "But you couldn't do it. Not that I'd have minded."

Gyp breathed a harsh sound of disbelief and turned away from her steady, smiling gaze.

She said, "I've been standing there, watching you. I knew what you were doing, but I knew it wouldn't do any good to interfere. It was something you had to work out for yourself one way or the other. I'm glad it worked out this way."

Gyp wiped the sweat off his face with one arm. "Why are you talking like this?" he asked roughly.

"Because I think Joe is right about your troubles. I don't think you're

guilty, and neither does Father Pierre. None of us would mind very much if we were stuck here for the rest of our lives; but we would like to see you get out and prove your innocence."

"Why can't people keep out of—" Gyp began savagely. "I'm sorry," he amended. "I seem to be slightly mixed up."

"Aren't we all?" said Caroline throatily. "Believe me, Gyp, I've been terribly mixed up about you. It was a shock to realize that I not only didn't recognize you when I saw you in Kits Harbour, but I almost hated you. You see, I'd been indulging in hero-worship for a long time. I thought you were pretty super. That's why I named the —the little dog 'Perry'—after you. I kept a scrap-book of clippings—"

"ALL RIGHT." Gyp faced her abruptly. "That's enough. Now you know what a weak-kneed washout I am; but you don't have to brace my morale with pretty pictures of the past. None of that counts any more now. I picked up my tail and ran when things got really tough. But I'm all through running now, and you're getting out of here whether you want to or not."

"Of course I want to get out. I've got a fight of my own to settle out there. And something worthwhile fighting for. But if we don't make it—I guess I could get used to living here. At least I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that Perkins can't rob me. I want to tell you about that, Gyp."

"It's uranium, isn't it?"

"How did you know?"

"I know that whole region is rich in pitchblende deposits, and from the remarks Mac Kinlock made to you the night he demanded to see your father's letter, I concluded it had to be something a lot more important than copper. And the most important element in the world today is the uranium derived from pitchblende."

"Yes. And that's why I had to insist on making this flight, Gyp. If Perkins got there before me, and destroyed my fathers' records, I'd have no proof of ownership at all, except Dad's last letter, which isn't enough. But now—" She laughed shakily. "If Perkins and I are both stuck here, I suppose Mac Kinlock will get the mines. He was named executor in my father's will."

"You won't be stuck. The radio's working. Joe managed to get one message through before he fell off the wagon, but he didn't attempt to give our location, so I've sat here for three days and nights, trying to find the courage to do it."

"Oh," she breathed. "Oh, Gyp, do you think—"

Petty began to bark, and came bounding out of the thick grass like a rabbit. Gyp scooped her up and silenced her as Caroline said tensely:

"How soon can you send the message?"

"As soon as I replace a few parts," replied Gyp bitterly.

"Then I'll stay here and keep watch, just—just in case."

"In case I change my mind?"

"You won't," she answered cryptically.

CHAPTER XV

THE valley was heavy with morning mist when Caroline climbed into the plane and woke Gyp. She was gasping and her face was drawn with terror. Gyp was up instantly, grasping her arms.

"What's— What is it?" He shook her roughly. "What's the matter?"

"Joe—" she gasped brokenly. "He —I think he's dead!"

Gyp stared at her uncomprehendingly for an instant, then he was scrambling out of the plane and running toward the camp.

Father Pierre was standing over the wildly scattered brush that had been Joe's bed. His face was gray with strain and he extended a hand that trembled as Gyp lunged through the low entrance.

For a long instant Gyp stood there with sagging shoulders, gazing at the contorted limbs and bulging eyes, then he looked up at the priest with teeth bared and flaming murder in his eyes.

Father Pierre nodded and said: "Strychnine."

"Are you sure?" Gyp's voice was an animal growl.

"Fairly certain. The symptoms are there."

"And I knew!" Gyp snarled. "I knew, and I left him here—helpless, drunk!"

Father Pierre did not pretend to understand. "Easy, Gyp," he said softly.

"Where were you?" rasped Gyp. "He's been dead for hours! Where were you?"

"I'm sorry, Gyp. I've been sleeping in the cook shed. It was more —restful. We didn't know until this morning."

Gyp whirled blindly and the priest seized his arm with both hands. "Gyp, listen to me!" he pleaded. "Caroline and I still need you. Don't go rushing into something and get yourself killed. Listen to me!"

Gyp shook himself free and plunged toward the door, but Caroline was there. She flung herself against him and held him tightly, panting his name.

"Gyp—Gyp, don't! They'll be waiting for you! Gyp—darling, don't leave me now—"

Slowly the hot tension subsided and he looked down at her tear-stained face. "All right," he said hoarsely. "I'll be all right."

"We've got to use our heads, Gyp," said Father Pierre quietly. "This is murder, but our situation is a little unusual. I think if we went out together and confronted them—"

"All right," Gyp said again in that flat, rasping voice. "But they're not going to get away with this."

Perkins and Grass had already emerged from their hut on the other side of the camp. They were standing in front of the cook shed, waiting. Perkins' heavy face was impassive, but Grass wore a mask of fury and hate.

"Nice going, Carrie," he said sharply. "And now you lead the lamb to the slaughter. I knew you could do it."

Caroline's step faltered a little and she moved away from Gyp. Father Pierre planted himself squarely in front of the men, his hands behind his back. He said:

"Joe Dobson was murdered last night. Unless I am mistaken, he was given strychnine poisoning in a bottle of liquor. The liquor, of course, came from one of you two men."

"Of course it did," said Perkins coolly. "Friend Grass has been unnecessarily liberal with it lately. But that doesn't mean that the poison, if any, came from either one of us."

"Let's cut out the harangue," said Grass tensely, "and get down to the business on hand."

"We will," said Gyp flatly. "The liquor was poisoned when you fed it to him, and since you're acting under orders from Perkins, that makes you both guilty."

"I can't think why it should," cut in Perkins, unruffled. "Poison, I believe, is supposed to be a woman's weapon, and certainly Miss What's-hername had freer access to Dobson's hut

than either of us. Suppose we make a search for the poison?"

"Tut-tut," said Grass. "Let's not be too hard on Carrie. She's done her job very well. That was a nice little scene you put on last night, my dear." Carrie gasped and recovered herself. "Oh, yes," he went on, "I followed you. I wanted to be sure you didn't have any trouble with the brute. I was right there. I know all about the radio, and how well it worked when he sent out his message last night. I believe I'll be able to carry on from there, thanks to you. You handled him very cleverly, Carrie. And what a smart stunt you used to get him out of the plane." He drew his gun smoothly and his thin face twisted with savage glee at the expression on Gyp's face.

Gyp's fingers had flicked at an empty holster. He understood now in a moment of dizzy despair, what Grass had been talking about, Carrie—Caroline had taken his gun as she clung to him in the door of the hut.

"Has some one taken your gun, *Colonel* Perry?" demanded Grass in a voice strangely choked with fury, as he aimed his own weapon at Gyp's stomach.

"YES, I have it!" Caroline fired as she spoke. There was a stuttering echo, swift movement from the priest, and oddly, incredibly both Perkins and Grass were down.

Gyp was dazed with the sudden and totally unexpected action. He watched Father Pierre walk casually to the fallen Perkins and pick up the man's gun. He looked toward Grass who was sprawled on his back, a red stain welling rapidly through his shirt where the jacket had fallen away from his shoulder. He heard a sob at his side and turned to see Caroline slumped there, her gun arm hanging limply, her other hand supporting her head as if it were suddenly too heavy for her neck.

"Carrie!" he said sharply. "Caroline, are you hurt?" He caught at her fearfully and she fell limply against him. "Caroline—"

"No. I'm all right," she mumbled. "It's only the after-effect. Did I kill him?"

"I don't know. But why in God's name did you do it?"

"Here." She handed him his gun without answering his question, and walked heavily into the cook shed where Grass had fallen.

The man was not dead, but he had a bad shoulder wound. Father Pierre joined them and after a brief examination went for the first aid kit.

"Boil some water, Caroline," he directed crisply over his shoulder. "And you'd better watch Perkins, Gyp. He'll be coming around in a moment."

Gyp found Perkins moving and muttering. He had a swelling bruise on his forehead, almost dead center between his eyes. Gyp studied it with a puzzled frown, and shook his head. The whole thing was still incredible. He thought of Joe and his fists clenched convulsively. He stooped and got his hands under Perkins' shoulders and dragged the man into the cook shed. He hauled and pushed him into one of the seats taken out of the plane and fastened him securely by passing a rope several times around his body and the chair.

Caroline was staunching the thick blood flowing from Grass's wound as Father Pierre came trotting back with the kit. The priest went to work with deft fingers. The bullet had entered the right shoulder at an angle and passed out the back, barely missing the shoulder-blade. It seemed likely that the man would bleed to death.

Gyp took another look at Perkins. His eyes were glazed, but he seemed

aware of what was going on. His ruddy color had changed to dull gray and his mouth fell open crookedly like a badly hung door.

Gyp turned away and spoke to Caroline. "I'm going to the plane," he said briefly. "The radio."

She raised a haggard face. "Of course, Gyp. I'll be here."

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Gyp returned to the camp, he found Perkins fully conscious and seething with indignation.

"What *are* we going to do with him?" asked Father Pierre wearily. "He certainly can't stay in that position indefinitely. If I thought we could put any trust in the man's word, I'd say turn him loose, but—" He shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I've got a nice comfortable cage fixed up for him in the tail of the plane," said Gyp. "We'll put him in there with the bare necessities and make the doors fast on the outside. I think that will hold him for the time being."

Caroline looked up from the campfire. Her eyes were enormous in a face pinched with fatigue.

"You must eat something, Gyp. You've had nothing all day."

"Later," he said gruffly. He turned on his heel and started toward the hut where Joe's tortured body lay, and suddenly swung back. "Neither have you," he said. "None of us has eaten anything. I think we'll feed Perkins whatever food you had on hand. The rest of us can eat later out of containers that haven't been tampered with."

Perkins was purple faced, straining at the ropes which held him. "You—you're insane!" he gasped. "You're using this as an excuse to poison me! I refuse—I—"

"I thought so," said Gyp coldly. "The food *has* been tampered with. You weren't missing any bets, were you?"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Father Pierre. "You haven't tasted anything, have you, Caroline?"

"No—no—" She shuddered.

"All right," snapped Gyp. "We'll bury all of it and use the supplies that were stored in the plane."

Black night had fallen before the three of them finally gathered around the campfire, almost too exhausted to eat. With a good deal of scuffling resistance, Perkins had been stowed safely in the plane, and the uncontaminated supplies moved to the camp. Petty, too, was exhausted, having followed all the activity on industrious short legs. She lay flopped on her side near Gyp, twitching in her sleep.

George Grass was completely still, wrapped in blankets and supported on the pillows Perkins had brought along for his own comfort. Father Pierre glanced at him from time to time and shook his head gravely.

"We've done all we can, Father," said Caroline gently. "And that sulfa powder worked wonders on the battlefields."

"Why did you shoot him, Caroline?" asked Gyp.

"You mean—why did I take your gun, don't you, Gyp?" She looked at him steadily. "It was because I didn't want you to shoot anybody. I wanted you to go out of here without any—any—"

"Without any further suspicion of murder," Gyp finished for her. "I see. But you were taking an awful chance. You were facing two of them. And that reminds me, what *did* happen to Perkins?"

Father Pierre pulled a sturdy slingshot out of his pocket. "This," he said. "I'm a pretty good shot, too."

"H'mph!" Gyp shook his head helplessly. "You're a couple of lucky fools, but for the love of heaven, don't make a habit of it!"

"It was close," admitted Father Pierre. "They both fired, you know. Perkins, I think, was aiming at Caroline. Grass, of course, meant to get you."

"I can't understand why he behaved as he did," said Gyp. "The man was insane with anger."

"You heard what he said. He witnessed your meeting with Caroline last night, and obviously, he also witnessed her attempt to hold you back when you wanted to rush out of the hut. No doubt he saw her slip your gun out of the holster. He was too wrought up to figure out her reason for doing it. But he was bent on making you suffer before he killed you. He tried to make you believe that she had been playing you along in order to betray you, whereas he knew that actually he was the one she had made a fool of, by pretending to permit his attentions."

"IT WAS only because of—of what Joe told me," said Caroline softly, not looking up. "He told me you wanted us all to be as friendly as possible so I— But I didn't know he'd get quite so unmanageable."

"You don't know your own power," said Gyp, with a trace of his old bitterness.

"I'm sorry," she murmured.

"No, you're not."

She looked at him then and their gaze held for a long moment in which many things were said and answered without any need for words.

Father Pierre cleared his throat, and began to speak. "I think it is rather suggestive," he declared, "that there was no sign of a bottle in the hut with Joe. That would seem to me to mean that evidence was removed. The point is, can we recover it?"

Gyp sighed and turned to the priest. "We have the food we buried," he said. "Although, of course, we can't be sure any of it was actually poisoned. And I also have the scraps of the dog food that poisoned Caroline's dog."

"What?" gasped Caroline.

"Yes. I found it that night and buried it, too. We know that has strychnine in it. But our best source of proof will be in the rescue plane—when and if it arrives. I've asked them to send along a doctor for Grass. He can perform an autopsy, or at least take samples for analysis. I'm pretty sure that's possible, even after some time has elapsed."

There was a faint sound from Grass and his hand was moving feebly. "Carrie," he muttered. "Carrie."

Father Pierre made a sign with his hand and Caroline knelt beside the makeshift bed. "Yes, George," she murmured.

"Carrie . . . am I . . . going out?"

She hesitated, and said, "I don't know, George. But just lie still. I'll take care of you."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"That's wonderful." He moved his hand again and she took it in her own. "I have to tell you—"

"You mustn't talk now. Just be quiet and rest."

"I have to tell you," he insisted weakly "Perkins . . . liar. Got no claim. Wants uranium. Wants . . ."

"I know."

"I made a bad mistake," he said distinctly. "Perkins . . . bad egg. Never shoulda had anything to do with 'im. Poisoned Joe. Shot me because I lost my head . . . over you." His fingers tightened convulsively. "Where's Perkins?"

"He's gone. It's all right. You're safe."

"Not me. You. Wants poison you. Poison ever'body . . ." His glassy eyes closed suddenly and his fingers slowly loosened as he drifted off again.

Caroline stood up and pushed back her hair with a bewildered gesture. "He thinks Perkins shot him," she said.

"It won't do any harm to let him think so," said Gyp quickly. "He'll spill plenty if he's able to talk again. We'll search Perkins' effects for the poison. Probably he intended to use it for rat poison, and it gave him the idea of exterminating us. His story would be that he and Grass had a separate camp, and that we ate some food growing here in the valley and were all poisoned. If the bodies were examined there would be no bullet holes to indicate murder."

"Dear me," sighed Father Pierre. "The man is a fiend. I'm afraid he is beyond help."

"He is," said Gyp shortly, "if I have anything to say about it."

CHAPTER XVII

THE government plane came from Edmonton. Before landing, a package of medical supplies was dropped by parachute, but the plane later itself made a fairly smooth landing, by following Gyp's radioed instructions. The pilot was an experienced Army flier and he answered Gyp's directions respectfully. On board were two officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and a physician.

One of the officers came forward briskly. "Colonel Perry?" he inquired, and surprised Gyp by extending his hand. "I'm Captain Hargrave."

Gyp acknowledged the introduction, and shook hands.

"This is Dr. MacLean," the captain continued, "and Sergeant Murphy. How's your patient?"

"Still hanging on," said Gyp brusquely, leading the way to the camp. "I suppose you have a full report of my radio messages?"

'Oh, yes. That's why I brought Murphy along. Plane won't accommodate all of us in one trip. 'Fraid to risk it in a heavier ship. Clear weather should hold long enough to make a second trip. If not—try it with a gyro next summer. In that case, have to ask you to wait several months. Long wait —hope you don't mind."

"I don't mind, no," said Gyp grimly. "But I was under the impression that I'm a badly wanted man."

"Out of my jurisdiction. No connection whatever. I'm after these two highbinders—Perkins and Grass. Verified your report. Got it definite. Crooks. Trying to hi-jack a mine. All Brindle's papers in order—full proof. Partnership agreement with Perkins paid off—cancelled years ago. Perkins' copy no good now. Good job you stopped 'em. Might have used uranium illegally."

Gyp glanced at the striding captain with some amazement. His long face was solemn, his brows knit in concentration—a man intent on a purpose. Whereas the doctor and red-faced Sergeant Kelly were obviously impressed by the valley, the captain moved along as if stopping off at a tropical valley were an everyday part of his Arctic patrol. As soon as he arrived at the camp, he got down to business immediately by making a formal arrest of Perkins after he had been dragged out of the plane by Sergeant Murphy. Perkins still retained his nerve, but his ruddy, prosperous appearance had changed. His pasty

face was bearded and flabby and he no longer carried himself with authority. He refused to make any statement, and sat with an air of sullen defiance, his handcuffed hands in his lap.

Dr. MacLean was somewhat surprised to find Grass's wound healing without complications, and reported that the man could be moved in a day or two. He agreed, meanwhile, to perform an autopsy on Joe Dobson. Gyp had asked for permission to bury him in the valley. He had spent long hours fashioning a casket by hammering metal strips from the plane on a wood frame. The casket was opened for the autopsy and then Father Pierre conducted the burial service in the tangled rose bower where Joe Dobson had waked up in paradise, and gone back to sleep again.

IN THE six days since Joe's death, Gyp had been tormented by the dreadful sense of his own responsibility. When Caroline tried to console him, he said:

"I am a fool. A wretched, blind fool! I was so obsessed by my own selfish interests that I was able to convince myself that nobody else was in danger of being poisoned. You might all have been—dead. If I hadn't been so damned interested in myself and all my desires and ambitions, none of this would have happened, I'd never have started running in the first place. I'd have stood my ground and fought the accusations, as Joe thought I should do, in spite of the fact that the one person in the world that I loved and fully trusted had turned against me. Instead, I went running like a whipped cur—and it cost Joe his life."

"No, Gyp. That isn't strictly true, and Joe would be the first to deny it. What really cost him his life was—his own weakness. If he hadn't been drinking, it couldn't have happened."

"That doesn't excuse me," said Gyp bitterly.

"No," she said thoughtfully. "But in time you'll learn that there are different kinds of grief, just as there are different kinds of love. There is a selfish love that wants all for itself alone, and there is a selfish grief that hugs its pain and tortures itself with its own sins."

"How can grief be generous?"

"By forgetting yourself, and thinking only of the object of your grief, of all the fine things about him, and all that he would want you to do if he could still be here to see it."

"Thanks, Carrie." He pressed her shoulder and resumed his endless pacing, and thinking, with Peggy tagging along.

On his second day in the valley, Captain Hargrave methodically took down their individual statements, and completed his outline of the case against Perkins. Caroline had found the bottle of poison crystals planted in her hut, which explained Perkins' suggestion that a search be made for the poison, just before George Grass blew his scheme to bits by trying to shoot Gyp. The case was clinched when Grass weakly made a full confession of his part in the scheme, still believing that Perkins had shot him. By throwing suspicion on Caroline, Perkins had hoped to stall off any decisive action over Joe's death until the other members of the party had eaten the poisoned food, and using his pretended suspicion as an excuse to refuse to eat anything prepared by Caroline.

Captain Hargrave encountered his only difficulty when he tried to induce Caroline to leave the valley on the first trip out. She flatly refused, and insisted that she had no intention of flying east to Edmonton.

"But my dear lady," said the captain reasonably, "you can't fly west from here! Dangerous! Too many mountains, storms, all that. Can't for the life of me understand why you people tried to make the trip from the west coast in the first place—suicidal! Should have started from Edmonton—this weather."

"I can explain that," said Caroline easily. "I went direct to Kits Harbour because I thought Mac Kinlock might have my father's papers, and Perkins and Grass were simply following me in the hope of preventing me from reaching the mines before them.'

"Hum, yes! Well, no mines involved here. All cleared up. Edmonton best place. Better come along."

"No, thank you," she said serenely. "Colonel Perry intends to stop off at Kits Harbour before returning to the States. I'll wait and go with him. I'm sure he can fly us out of here to the coast."

"What? No!" expostulated the captain. "Mustn't think of it. Wreck the plane! Mean to say, can't let you take the risk."

"I doubt if I'd be permitted to fly the plane," said Gyp dryly.

"Why not?" the youthful Army pilot laughed. "I'll bring her in, if you'll take her out, sir."

A WEEK later Gyp took them out after the pilot had made a successful return trip. Captain Hargrave had compromised by taking Perkins instead of Caroline, and the doctor and his patient went along to Edmonton. Sergeant Murphy was left behind, much to his secret delight, and he and Father Pierre spent the week gathering specimens, and taking photographs with the sergeant's police camera.

The return trip to Kits Harbour was pleasant in comparison to the flight through the blizzard. Unconsciously, Gyp displayed his mastery, feeling that this was, perhaps, his last flight over the breath-taking iridescent mountains. But when he set the plane down in Kits Harbour, he was startled to observe what could only be considered a mob in the sparsely populated locale.

When he followed his passengers out of the plane, he was bewildered by the yelling crowd which rushed at him. Flash bulbs lit the dusk as red-coated Mounties struggled to clear a path through the shouting, milling madmen. Some one took his arm, and he looked into the grinning, red face of Sergeant Murphy. He looked for Caroline and saw her embracing a rotund little man who had lost his hat, his thin hair standing on end as he rocked back and forth joyously with Caroline in his arms.

After much confusion and jostling, Gyp found himself in Mac Kinlock's warehouse office. Most of the madmen were still with him. They were apparently photographers and reporters, and his mouth tightened grimly as he told himself that he might have expected something of the sort. Another Roman holiday for the public and press —the killer caught, the trophies displayed.

Mac Kinlock's private office was open, and the fat man sat behind his battered desk with fingers clasped on his chest, smiling benignly. Suddenly Caroline was beside him, introducing the rotund little man who had greeted her.

"Gyp," she gasped breathlessly, with stars in her eyes. "This is Johnny Finchley! Isn't it wonderful?"

Gyp looked confused.

"Wait, Carrie, darling," said the little man in a high voice. "He doesn't know! By God, he doesn't even know!" He seized Gyp's lax arm and hauled

him toward Mac Kinlock's inner sanctum. "Here, you mugs!" he shouted shrilly. "Clear out of the way! This is mine—All right, keep your pants on, you'll get him in a minute! This is private—"

Somehow he managed to get Gyp into the private office and slammed the door.

"Congratulations, Gyp," said Kinlock melodiously.

"Now, my man," puffed Johnny Finchley, planting himself before Gyp with legs spread and fists on his hips. "Brace yourself for the good news—Ready? This is it—You're cleared! You're vindicated! You're clean! Get it?" He pounded his own chest. "And who pulled it off? Me! Little Johnny Finchley, the smart boy. I broke the news three hours ago, as soon as all the news hounds had got here. Boy, if you hadn't made it we'd have been a sick bunch of tomatoes!"

Dazed, Gyp looked at Caroline. She was laughing with tears in her eyes. "It's true Gyp! Joe was right. Johnny did pull it off. Here, darling, sit down for heaven's sake, you look like you're punch drunk."

Gyp sank into a chair and for some reason couldn't let go of Caroline's hand.

"All right," he said in a dry, rasping voice. "Let's hear it."

"It goes like this," said Johnny Finchley. "Joe Dobson wrote to me and told me why he thought you were innocent, and why I should—"

"I know all that." Gyp brushed it aside with his palm. "But what happened?"

"THIS happened: I gambled on Joe Dobson's instincts. I called on your wife and pulled a grand bluff. I told her I knew where you were, that you were with a very good friend of yours and mine, and that this friend and I knew the whole inside story. I told her I was writing it up, and wanted to give her every possible break. I made a big thing of it, and went into detail. Finally, she cracked. She thought you had talked. So she quick made a deal with me to save her own face—if not her neck. She confided that she had found the suicide note, and she still had it. She was afraid to destroy it in case anything went wrong—as it did. So-o-o, the deal was this: I agreed to make up a little story about how the suicide note was found after all this time, when her father's study was being cleaned. It had slipped down behind the desk, and lo and behold! it was found! In return she agreed to give me the suicide note, and brother, that was it! A full confession, just as Joe Dobson had guessed it. So your wife requested permission to change her testimony—and there you have it!"

"He confessed?" asked Gyp uncertainly, still unwilling to believe it.

"The works!" Johnny Finchley flipped a cigarette out of his pocket and lit it. "He designed the plane without your knowledge. He knew it was no good, but he gave you a song and dance about keeping the construction strictly secret, and since you were the front man it would be easier for you if you didn't know from nothing. Then you wouldn't have to be constantly on guard for fear of letting the secret leak. You trusted him all right, but then you got a little out of hand, and put on a secret altitude test, and blew the whole thing wide open. The government stepped in with an investigation, and you went to the old man and told him to cough up the company funds, or else. He wrote the note, told where the balance of the funds were—in a dummy account, and blew out his brains. A little better than seventy per cent of the funds have been recovered, by the way."

Long after the rest of the noisy, crowded town had gone to sleep, Gyp sat on the edge of his bed in the shabby hotel with his head in his hands. His mind was a blurred confusion, which refused to comprehend all that had taken place. At last he got up, picked up his cap, and went quietly down the stairs and out into the misty blackness. He walked in the middle of the rutted road, headed toward the edge of town where the small, wooden church thrust an ambitious steeple toward the sky. A light glimmered in the cottage nearby and Father Pierre opened the door instantly to his knock. Petty ran out of the parlor, barking and scolding him for being absent so long. Caroline was seated in an old-fashioned rocker near the glowing pot-bellied stove. Gyp walked in without speaking and sat down beside her.

"Coffee, Gyp?" asked Father Pierre.

"Yes, thanks, Father." The priest disappeared into the kitchen.

"Did you eat any dinner?" asked Caroline.

"What? No, I don't think so."

Caroline got up and followed Father Pierre. The dog pawed at his knee until he pulled her into his lap where she curled up like a pretzel, limp and warm. Gyp closed his eyes and sat very still until the hearty smell of bacon and eggs and coffee roused him. Caroline brought a small table and placed it in front of him. He ate voraciously, with the dog in his lap, and without saying a word. When he finally put down his empty coffee cup with a gusty sigh, Father Pierre grinned with pleasure.

"Thanks," said Gyp, and closed his eyes again.

"Would you like to sleep here, Gyp?" asked the priest.

"No. I thought you might talk, you and Caroline. I'm a little confused."

"No wonder," said Father Pierre gently. "It must have been a tremendous surprise. You were so bound and determined to go to jail and stand trial for murder. It wasn't such a big surprise to me, was it to you, Caroline?"

"No, Father. And do you know why? There was something about the attitude of Captain Hargrave, and that pilot. They didn't behave as if they thought there was anything wrong about Gyp."

"I noticed that, too," said the priest. "But if they knew the facts, it's odd they didn't say anything."

"No, they didn't know the facts. I asked Johnny Finchley about that, and he said that all anybody knew was that Gyp had identified himself from a mysterious tropical valley in the Northwest, and that the prosecuting attorney had made a statement, saying that the famous Perry case was to be re-opened because of new evidence which raised serious doubts about Gyp's knowledge of the crimes or any complicity in them."

"I see," said Father Pierre, watching Gyp's face. "That's why nobody said anything, because they had nothing definite to go on, until Johnny Finchley broke the news about the suicide note and confession."

"Oh," said Gyp, without opening his eyes.

FATHER PIERRE and Caroline smiled at one another and went on talking, reviewing the whole thing and straightening it out for Gyp's benefit. Gradually the confusion cleared, and at last he opened his eyes and tried a lop-sided grin. It was a little shaky from disuse, but it stayed there.

"Thanks," he said again. "I've kept you both up long enough. Come along, Caroline, I'll take you back to the hotel."

He thrust Petty inside his leather jacket and went down the road holding Caroline's hand.

"Caroline?"

"Yes, Gyp."

"There's one more thing. What did you mean when you said the little dog —the one you called 'Perry,' was all you had left?"

"I told you Petty was yours."

"Yes, but—"

"And I had already lost my Dad."

"I know. But there must have been somebody else."

"No. There wasn't. Oh, I suppose you heard some of the stories about me, how I retired to Park Avenue and a life of sinful luxury. But my only butter-and-egg man was my Dad. After the mines started making money, he sent most of it to me."

"I see," said Gyp carefully. "Then I'd just like to tell you this. After what happened to me, I thought I'd never want to look at another woman again, but—I do."

"Gyp—please! You'll crush Petty!"

"She doesn't mind."

"In fact," said Gyp, after a long time, "it's the only possible solution as far as Petty is concerned. But for Pete's sake! Let's change her name to Oscar or Butch, or something. I can't go around yelling for 'Petty' every time she gets loose!"

THE END

AMERICA'S CAMEL CARAVAN

★ By H. R. STANTON ★

SOMEONE saw a wild camel wandering alone in the desert above Banning, California, in 1929 and thought they were dreaming. The animal was real enough. It had not strayed from a circus, and a scientist could not give a satisfactory explanation for that camel's presence. A historian familiar with the growth of the West could tell a curious story about the animal.

Few people are aware of the fact that the camel played a part in the building of the West. It was necessary to import them from abroad, of course. Jefferson Davis was responsible for the first shipment of those animals to this country. As Secretary of War in 1853, he asked Congress for an appropriation to finance a military camel corps to be used by the army in the western deserts. Congress responded to the tune of $30,000, which went a long way in those days.

The problem of transporting those bulky creatures was brought into sharp focus even before they were put aboard the United States store-ship. The camels balked at the sight of water and refused to walk onto the flatboats which were to carry them out to the ship. After much deliberation, the sailors decided to build platforms on wheels which could be run far up on the beach. There, out of sight of the water, the camels were coaxed onto the platforms, securely tied in place, and then rolled down to the beach and up on the flatboats which were to carry them out to the ship. The system worked well. Once at the ship's side, the animals were hoisted on board by means of a block and tackle.

The vessel, after the initial delay, was soon underway, and the ship's crew thought their troubles were over. They soon learned, to their great disappointment, that the real difficulties were just beginning. One camel was too tall for the hold, and an opening had to be cut in the deck for his hump. When the sea was rough, a new problem arose. It was necessary to strap the camels down in a kneeling position so they would not break their legs. The Arab camel tenders fared worse than the animals. Everyone of the them became so seasick they could not fulfill their duties. This meant that the American sailors, unusued to the ways of camels, had to care for the beasts. After a very hectic journey, during which one camel died and two were born, the ship landed at Indianola, Texas.

The first camel camp was established at San Antonio, Texas. A second load arrived from abroad increasing the size of the herd to seventy-eight. The first camel train ordered by the War Department was to accompany a detachment of soldiers on a trek from Texas to California. En route, they were to make camp in Arizona and aid in the building of a new road. This expedition was ordered as a test; it was an attempt to prove the usefulness of the camel in western America.

The problems the caravan encountered on the journey were numerous, you may be sure. The group was made up of a wagon train drawn by mules and a train of twenty-five camels loaded with corn for the mules. The camels had fleas, millions of fleas which made them unpopular with the soldiers.

Before the caravan got underway, the Arab camel tenders deserted. This meant that the soldiers were burdened with the care of both the

mules and the camels. They were forced to learn through sad experience how to pack the camel's load properly. At first the animals got sore backs from badly balanced loads, and the men tried to cure the sores with application of bacon fat and gunpowder. But in time the men learned that packing camels is very different from packing mules.

The camels wore bells on their necks, and all along the way the settlers flocked around the animals convinced that they were part of a traveling show. The Indians, on the other hand, were afraid of these strange looking creatures. The route took the expedition through El Paso and up the Rio Grande to Albuquerque, New Mexico, then through Arizona. While making roads in the almost unknown regions of Arizona, the expedition underwent many hardships. Many times they found themselves short of food and water; once they were nearly lost.

The soldiers who had started by hating camels, now had a great respect for them. They seemed to be able to endure every inconvenience of the desert. Lieutenant Beale reported that ". . . they will get fat where a jack-ass would starve to death." They preferred prickly desert shrubs to good grass. They were able to carry six-hundred pound loads easily; they never stumbled. Drinking little and seldom, they were docile and quiet at all times. When they reached the Colorado River, they amazed the soldiers by swimming across.

Although Beale handed a very enthusiastic report to Congress of the performance of the animals and recommended that at least one thousand more be imported, he was ignored. No more camels were bought for the army, for the outbreak of the Civil War had given Congress other things to think about.

Various means were used to dispose of the herd, and to make the camels which remained with the quartermaster's corps earn their keep. When the war broke out, the Confederate Army took most of them. The Southern soldiers were anxious to get the strange animals off their hands; many of them were allowed to wander away into the wilds and get lost. Some camels were captured by Union troops and sent to Iowa to aid in road-making and surveying expeditions. Others were carrying freight between San Pedro and Los Angeles, but there were so many complaints from teamsters that the camels frightened horses and mules that the animals were given up and sold at public auction. The civilian purchasers utilized them as pack animals between Sacramento and the Nevada mining camps.

Camels were purchased by a Nevada company to carry salt two hundred miles from a marsh to the Washoe mines; although they did their work well their drivers did not know how to care for them and abused them, letting their feet grow sore and their backs become caked with salt and alkali. Some of these camels died; others escaped into the Nevada desert. In parts of the Southwest camels were seen for years after men had given up the attempt to turn them into pack animals.

The veteran miner, or "desert rat," had rich tales to tell about giant camels, camels wearing saddles, and camels being ridden by skeletons. These legends have been firmly woven into the lore of the desert. For years on the Arizona roads camels would loom up unexpectedly at night, frightening horses and mules, to say nothing of drivers in a slightly drunk condition. Many camels were shot down or chased back into the hill country.

The wild camel someone caught sight of in 1929 was probably not the figment of that person's imagination. The animal may have been the great-grandchild of one of the builders of the West.

★ THE REPTILE MAN ★

ROSS ALLEN, owner and director of the Ross Allen Reptile Institute, in Silver Springs, Florida, knows more about alligators and deadly reptiles than anyone today. Because of his highly precarious activities with these mighty creatures of death and treachery, Allen has been featured in twenty-eight motion pictures and some sixty-five newsreel stories concerning the antics of his little "playmates."

Allen is almost as ferocious, at least in appearance, as his opponents. To give an idea of his peerless courage, he wrestles in the water with ten-foot alligators and catches rattlesnakes bare handed.

He has had many thrills and chills with these ugly brutes. Once, for example, when Ross was making a faked capture for the benefit of a newsreel, an eight-foot alligator grabbed his arm between its jaws. Having worked with these creatures for so many years has given Ross a psychological understanding of them, and it was only this skill that saved him. Sensing his desire, they did not goad the animal on, and after absolute inactivity on the part of all concerned, the reptile relaxed its fierce hold to change positions, and Ross seized the opportunity to jerk his arm loose.

HE WAS able then to tear into the 'gator, as he now had the advantage of having caught the animal off guard. The next several minutes were anybody's, with fighting and snapping taking part on both sides. First, Ross was on the monster's back, holding its mouth open, then the bull would turn over, and its thorny back would be above and Ross would be on the bottom. After a long and terrific struggle, Ross finally conquered the ruthless brute.

But chills and excitement as this just do not mean anything in the life of a man who has chosen a life packed full of adventure such as Ross finds part of his life every day.—*Gerald Keller.*

NO HOLDS BARRED

by Alexander Blade

THAT night Benjy and I wrestled at Bright City Amusement Park, out on Chicago's south side. Since that neighborhood is thick with Swedes and Irish I appeared as Lars Svenson, the Swedish Strangler, and Benjy came on as Dinny Riordan, the Killarney Killer. As it happens, my real name is Reilly and Benjy's is Finkelstein and we lived on the same street in the Bronx.

At that moment I had Benjy on the mat and was giving him what could have been a hammerlock if I'd tried.

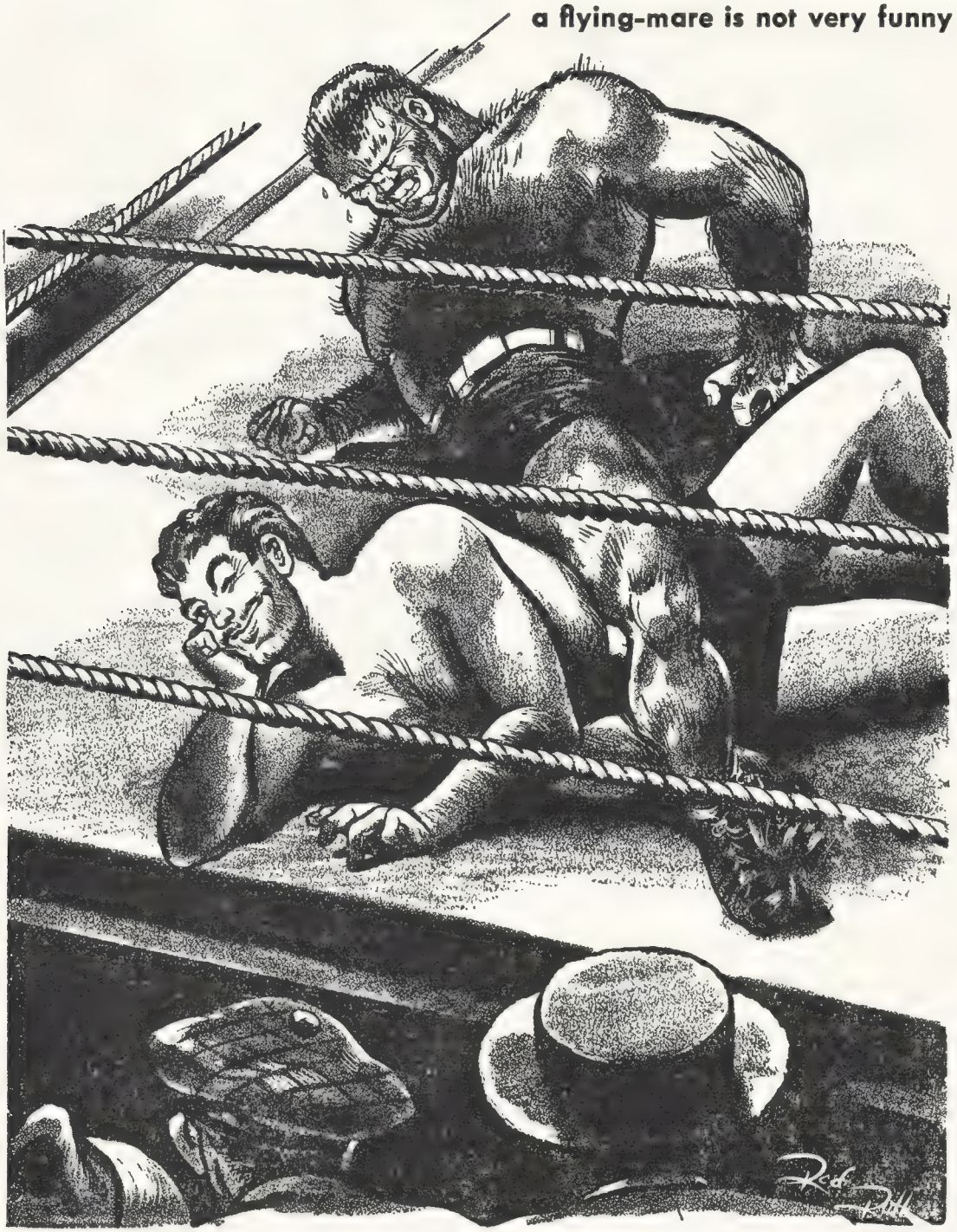
"How was the movie, Jim?" Benjy asked.

I made a face like I was trying to break his arm. "Good," I muttered. "Did you get a letter from your mother today?"

With a shriek of pain Benjy flung

That was when I saw the girl

Professional wrestling is swell for a lot of laughs, but mobsters can find that a flying-mare is not very funny



himself around and I switched to a half-nelson. "Yeah, I got a letter," he grunted. "She says she's feeling better now and your ma is all right too. And she sends you a 'geriss'." A "geriss' is a greeting.

The ref came over and whispered to us. "Hey, you guys, speed it up. The crowd is getting edgy."

"So we'll speed it up," Benjy told him. "Look out, Jim, I'm going to kick you in the belly."

I let him out of the half-nelson and he turned over fast. With a murderous roar he drove his foot at my stomach. Just as it got there I flung myself backward and went all the way across the ring. The crowd was howling now.

We both got on our feet, Benjy looking like a fifty gallon barrel that was covered with black hair and mounted on piano legs. We both weigh about two hundred and ten but I'm blond and tall with a lot of taper.

We stayed on our feet a while and gave the crowd a show. Then I slapped Benjy across the face with all my might —it looked like.

"The flying mare," Benjy said as he closed in with a blood-curdling scream.

The flying mare is one of our best stunts because I'm so much taller than Benjy that when he throws me over his shoulder it looks like he spattered me all over the mat. This time I landed with a crash that sounded like I had come down from the roof.

Benjy flung himself down on me but broke the force by landing mostly on his hands, on the mat. With a twist he threw me on my face and gave me a fake muscle massage along my spine.

"Break his back, Dinny Boy!" a red faced Irishman in the third row yelled.

All the Swedes were hollering, "Foul! Foul!" I gave the ref a piteous look and he leaned over us like he was bawling Benjy out. Benjy pushed him away, growling. Then Benjy raised both his hands and brought them down again, one on the back of my head and one across the shoulders.

The one on my shoulders made all the noise. The other pushed my face gently into the mat. But my nose bleeds easy and with a little smearing around I made it look as though I was mortally wounded.

THAT was when I saw the girl. She was coming down the aisle that led to my corner. An usher put her in a front row seat and I could see her face real clear.

"A peach," I said. "A darb."

Benjy knows me too well to think I meant the bloody nose he'd given me.

"Where's she sitting?" he whispered. I told him and he looked.

He sounded worried when he got his head down again. "Yeah, she's a honey, Jim. But she acts like she's scared to death."

"Lemme see," I grunted.

Benjy rolled a little so I could see better. While he pretended he was squeezing my guts out with a body scissors I gave her the once-over.

She was pretty, all right. Her hair was a kind of reddish brown with glints in it and was pulled back in natural waves around an oval face. Her brow was high enough to make her look like she knew some of the answers at least and her slightly pugged nose and firm little chin showed that she would give them to you. I couldn't see the color of her eyes.

And she was as interested in wrestling as I am in knitting. Her face was deathly pale and she kept turning her head around as though she was afraid someone had followed her. While I watched, a tall, broad-shouldered man with a crew haircut and a scarred face came down the aisle and dropped into

a seat about two rows behind her. After that she looked more scared than before but she didn't turn around again.

"Get this over in a hurry," I grunted to Benjy.

It was to be two falls out of three and we had split the first two. Since there were more Swedes than Irish in the crowd I was supposed to win.

"How do you want it?" Benjy whispered.

"Airplane spin," I told him.

I broke his scissors with a chest expansion that Charles Atlas could have duplicated when he was a ninety-seven pound weakling and we got to our feet again, me with the lower half of my face covered with blood and Benjy breathing like he was half dead from his exertions.

He fell back before my Viking rage and I butted him in the belly. Benjy being shaped like a gorilla, his belly is really rock hard but he can make it stick out like a watermelon. In his street clothes he looks fat, which mistaken notion has caused some people regret.

I followed the butt with a Savoldi drop kick and Benjy went down looking groggy. Grabbing a handful of thick black hair, I hauled him up, his feet doing most of the lifting, of course.

Then, to the cheers of the Swedes and the groans of the Irish, I straightened him up with a shove under his jaw and let him fall across the back of my neck onto my shoulders.

I MADE a circuit of the ring, whirling as I went, and even the Swedes held their breath. Then, with a mighty heave, I hoisted Benjy over my head and slammed him down to the mat. Using a grip that I made up for the occasion, I pinned Benjy's shoulders.

The next match was a one-fall affair between two local boys to wind up the card. While that was going on Benjy and I hurried through our showers and dressed. Our manager came in while we were knotting our shoelaces and gave us our cut.

"See you in Dubuque Wednesday night," I told him as we got into our coats.

"Des Moines," he reminded me.

"That's what Jim meant," Benjy said. I never worry about things like that because Benjy is not forgetful. So far we have never missed a date.

So as not to offend the customers we separated as we came up the ramp. Benjy sat in the back row of one section and I sat in the last row of the section the girl was in. She did not turn around once but sat with unnatural stiffness.

At last the local boys wore themselves out and the crowd got up to go. The girl didn't play it smart. She waited until everyone was out before she got up. I could see that she was an amateur at the game.

The guy with the crew haircut walked past me as though he didn't have a thing on his mind but I could see that his hard eyes were watchful. Benjy faded in alongside of me and we followed him out.

Of course it could have been that the tall man was the girl's husband and they'd had a spat. It could have been, but I knew it wasn't; girls like that don't do things that make them dodge their husbands.

"I'll take the other exit," Benjy whispered. I nodded and he went over and got a paper from the newsboy at the exit and leaned against the wall while he pretended to read it.

The girl played it wrong all the way. By the time she came out the lobby was deserted and even the newsboys were gone. Benjy was trying to act as though the newspaper fascinated him and I

loitered around like I was waiting for the cashier. Crew-cut was hanging just outside the door where I could see him but he couldn't see me. He wasn't interested in me anyway; his eyes were fixed on the girl as she started toward the exit.

Then, instead of continuing and going out on Sixty-Third Street, which was brightly lit, she swung over and headed toward Benjy! She would come out onto a dark side street. The man outside had a look on his face like the lions must have looked at Daniel when he first walked into the den. He waved his hand toward the corner and I heard a car's motor roar.

The corner was about fifty feet from the exit and I let him have enough time to get around it before I stepped onto the sidewalk. Then I went toward it, fast.

He was standing close to the wall where one of the columns that flanked the exit would hide him from anyone inside. The car, a four-door black Plymouth, must have come cross-corner and was drawn up at the curb, facing the wrong way.

She came out with the light behind her outlining her tall, lithe figure and she was swinging her purse with one hand while with the other she held a zipper case close to her side. Crew-cut let her get about ten feet away from the exit before he slid from his hiding place.

HE MADE a chopping motion with his hand and things began to happen like clockwork. Both doors of the Plymouth swung open and two men got out to block off the girl while the tall man fell into place behind her and cut off her retreat.

As soon as she saw the men jump out of the car she whirled about and started back. She ran right into the tall man's arms and he scooped her in like a returning vet grabs his mother. Then the other two came from behind and they started to drag her toward the car.

I didn't have time to wonder where Benjy was. Maybe he had really got interested in his paper! But the girl was putting up a struggle that gave me just the second or two that I needed. I hit those guys like Nagurski would hit a high school line and they bounced back just that way.

It didn't take them long to recover, though. They spread out like they had done this before and came at me from three different sides. One of them was swinging a blackjack, and what was in crew-cut's hand wasn't a water pistol.

It would have been the last fall for me if Benjy hadn't come in just then. He came in fast, shoved his palm into the tall man's back, and catapulted him into the man with the blackjack.

But these men weren't punks. In a minute we found ourselves in a whirl of flying fists, knees and elbows. The blackjack landed alongside my head. If it hadn't been a glancing blow it would have cracked my skull; as it was, I thought for a second that I was swimming the Milky Way on a clear night.

Then the gun went off and there was a yell in a voice that wasn't Benjy's and I went back to work with renewed vigor. I put a knee where it would do the most good and was gratified at the groan I heard. Meanwhile, Benjy tried to tip over the car by slamming crew-cut against it. Someone inside the car pulled the tall man in through the open front door; one of our opponents jumped in, holding his side; the last one hopped on the running board, and the fight was over as a cop came running up to us. The girl had vanished.

"What's goin' on here?" the cop demanded.

I pointed toward the fast disappear-

ing Plymouth. "Couple of guys tried to stick us up."

He ran his eyes over me and then took a good look at Benjy. He grinned. "That'll learn 'em. You want to come down to the station and give us a description?"

Benjy was shaking his head from side to side so I could almost hear his brains rattle. "It was too dark to see what they looked like," I said.

"Okay, okay," the cop grunted. He stared at Benjy suspiciously. "Ain't I seen you somewhere?"

Benjy was standing directly in front of a poster with his picture on it but he shook his head. "I've never been there," he said.

A TALL, dark, foreign appearing man with a pair of the coldest eyes I've ever seen outside a fish had run up with the cop. He was now busy putting our faces into a file that he kept in the back of his head. He'd remember us, that boy would. He walked away with the bluecoat and I could hear him saying something about an honest citizen not being safe on the streets any more.

"Whew!" I whistled. "We were lucky to get away with our skins. Those guys were out for blood! If that's the kind of company that gal keeps I hope we never see her again!"

"We better see her! And soon, too," Benjy said. I looked at him like I didn't know what he was talking about, which I didn't.

"Take a look at this," he said, unfolding his newspaper which he had stuck in his back pocket. "That's why I was so slow getting out here!"

And right there on the third page was a picture of the girl with the reddish brown hair and uptilted nose! Under her picture was a line that said: Secretary Sought.

"I'll bet," I said to myself, remembering the figure that went with the face.

"Take it over to the light and read it," Benjy told me.

I went back to the exit and read the paragraph under the picture. All it said was that Marcia Dunn was wanted on suspicion of murder! There was some more about the murdered man being her boss, a nuclear physicist at the university, but I didn't read it very carefully.

Benjy was tugging at my arm. "Get a move on, Jim. We've got to find that girl!"

I tried to resist but he pulled me along with him as he started down the street at a trot.

"Let the cops find her," I grumbled.

"What're you, nuts or something?" he snarled. "Can't you read between the lines?"

"No. Can you?"

"Yes."

"Then read it out loud!" I said as I ran alongside him.

"You know what a nuclear physicist is, don't you?"

"Sure," I puffed, "they're the guys that invented the atomic bomb."

"So one of them is murdered and they put it on the third page, huh?"

Well, if you stick it right under my nose even *I* can smell it! A story like that should have been in the front page headlines! And if it wasn't, you could bet your life that the cops were holding something back. I began to get an inkling of what it was when I recalled the leather case she had gripped so tightly. Also I remembered crew-cut and the scar on his face. Where had I seen guys who looked like that before?

"Benjy!" I yelled, "that guy was a . . ."

"If he wasn't then my name is Reilly!" Benjy and I had been on the '36 Olympic wrestling team together and we'd both made the trip to Berlin.

OF COURSE Benjy would remember that even better than I; it had been something very personal with him. I'll never forget the German who fouled him and at the same time called him a "verdammter Jude." That guy woke up in a hospital with a broken arm and some cracked ribs.

The street we were on ended in a dead end. "Let's split up," I suggested. "If we don't get together I'll see you at the rooming house later." We always stayed at the same place when we were in Chicago.

Benjy headed west and I went the other way. I kept up a stiff pace, figuring the girl wouldn't have got far in the time she'd had. It was almost a sure thing that she'd keep to the dark side streets for a while, too.

When I was about two blocks down I heard a whistle. It was the one we used to use for "Jigger, the cops!" when we stole apples off the stands on Delancey Street in New York. I knew what it meant this time and I headed back the way I had come.

Benjy had the girl by the arm and was trying to reassure her, as much as any girl can be reassured when she is in the clutches of a gorilla who is wearing a loud plaid sport coat.

"That was a nice chase you gave us," I panted to her as I pulled up beside them.

"What do you want?" she asked. pulled back and tightening her grip on the zipper case. Even in the gloom I could see that her eyes were big and frightened.

"I *think* we'd like to help you. We're the fellows who rescued you from those guys in the black car back there."

It made me like her all the better, the way she recovered.

"I don't mean to seem ungrateful," she said, "but I'm really in a great hurry. And I'm afraid you've done all you can do for me this evening."

"Could be," Benjy said. "But if you ask me, Miss Dunn, I'd say you're in a spot where you need a lot of help."

Hearing her name like that took all the fight out of her and she went limp and began to cry. We let her cry it out. When she was through I tried to talk to her.

"I saw you from the ring when you came in, Miss Dunn. Benjy and I could see that you were afraid of that guy who sat behind you so we waited for you after our match. Then Benjy saw your picture in the paper he was pretending to read."

"Oh!" she said, v e r y surprised, "you're the wrestlers!"

She looked from one of us to the other and suddenly she grinned. Right then, when we saw that grin, Benjy and I knew that she had never killed anybody, no matter what the paper said.

"And you're really friends, not mortal enemies like you pretended!"

"Not so loud," I warned her. "That act is good for a long time yet. This is Benjy Finkelstein and I'm Jim Reilly and we're both nice guys who'd like to help you if you'll let us."

She lost the smile. "No . . . You'd better not. You'd only get yourselves in trouble too."

THERE was a pipe fence that came just about up to her knees and she sank down on that. Her body began to sway up and back like she had just come to the end of her rope and didn't know what to do.

"I . . . I'd better give myself up," she said. "All afternoon and evening I've been dodging police by hiding in theaters. When I came out of one that man started to follow me and I ran into Bright City to get away from him. Now I don't know where to go or . . . or . . ."

"On that point your worries are temporarily over," I interrupted. "You can hide out in our room until we straighten this thing out."

I overruled her protest. "If you try to go home or get a hotel room the cops will get you sure."

After that she came along without a word. Our rooming house is on Harper Avenue, between Fifty-seventh and Fifty-eighth Streets. After ten o'clock the streets there are deserted, and anyway, you couldn't have seen her between me and Benjy.

Mrs. Benson's is an old mansion with a high English basement and a long flight of stairs that leads to the front door. Benjy went up the stairs and opened the door and went in. Marcia Dunn and I sneaked into the dark passageway between our rooming house and the one next to it and waited beneath the window of our room. In a minute a dim light showed. Then Benjy opened the window and leaned out.

"Stiffen up as much as you can," I told Marcia.

She got rigid as a board and I bent down and got a good grip on her ankles. Up she went, straight into Benjy's waiting arms. He hauled her in as though she weighed about five pounds. Then he lowered the shade and I went around to the front and let myself in with my key.

I met Mrs. Benson in the hall. She is a motherly, plump and grey haired woman who would bend a poker over your skull if she caught you sneaking out without paying your room rent but she had a soft spot in her heart for Benjy and me because we always paid extra for meals and we never tried to sneak stray women into our room.

"I thought I heard you boys going into your room," she said suspiciously.

"That was just Benjy," I said nonchalantly. "I stopped at the corner for some gum and I didn't catch up with him." As though I'd forgotten something I hesitated.

"By the way, Ma, Benjy is hungry. Do you think you could rustle him up a snack? You know, while he's here he hates to eat any of that bum restaurant food."

That line would always get her and I knew it. She knew I knew it too but she headed for the kitchen anyway. In a few minutes she brought out a tray and I took it and went down the hall to our room. Then I hung my coat over the door so she couldn't peek through.

"Here's your grub, Benjy," I said loudly. When I put my ear to the door I heard her footsteps going away.

THERE were some cold meats and some bread and butter on the tray, besides a big glass of milk and a slice of apple pie. Marcia fell to it with a zest that made me and Benjy hungry just watching her. Then she leaned back in our chair while we sat on the bed and nodded approvingly.

Benjy looked at me and gave a "hurry up" sign. When there are women involved he would rather I do the talking since he has an inferiority complex based on his looks.

"Look, Marcia," I began. "Here's the way the thing stacks up as far as we can see. You were this professor's secretary. He was murdered this afternoon in such a way that you are suspected. Now . . . It's plain that the case wouldn't get pushed onto the third page if there weren't something more to it. The cops are hushing things up.

"Since he was a nuclear physicist and probably connected with the bomb project it isn't hard to guess that whatever they're keeping under cover is something big. If that wasn't enough to tip us off there is that guy with the Prussian

hair-do and that zipper case that you're holding onto for dear life."

Marcia was staring at me like I was a magician pulling an elephant out of a six and five-eighths derby.

"And I believed that stuff about wrestlers being dumb!" she gasped.

"We average two hundred a week apiece and we've got most of it salted away for a big chicken farm when we get too old to wrestle," I told her, in case she might ever be interested in a chicken farm.

She was trying to be brave but her smiles didn't wear long. Her chin would come up for a little while and then it would go down again with the rest of her face following it.

"Give out," I said. "Maybe we can do you some good. After all, hiding out here is only a temporary expedient."

Marcia got that "what can I lose?" look in her eyes. "I guess I may as well. I couldn't be in a worse predicament than I am now." Once she was started I let her talk without interrupting her.

"Professor Wayne was the head of the department at the university. That meant that he was in complete charge of the bomb project there. As his secretary I was the only person besides himself who had access to certain files. He had one key to those files and I had the other.

"Naturally our work made us close friends. He was happily married but we became the target of some pretty vicious rumors. I don't know who started them, but in any case I think many people believed the stories.

"This afternoon, about two o'clock, I had to leave Professor Wayne's office to take some information elsewhere in the building. When I returned ten minutes later I found him lying on the floor, dead! And he had been shot with my gun!"

I STOPPED her. "What do you mean, your gun?"

"Once in a while I took some work home. Nothing vital, of course, but I wanted protection anyway, so Professor Wayne got me this gun and a permit.

"Well, I started to scream but managed to check it. The most important thing in that room was not Professor Wayne, nor even me. It was the special file. I swung around to look at it and found that it had been opened and then locked again! The reason I knew that was because there was a sheet of paper caught in it and a corner was sticking out. I knew that Professor Wayne would never have left it in that condition.

"I wear my key on a locket chain. I took it and opened the file. And all the most vital papers were gone. Somehow I forced myself to bend over the professor to see if he had his key. He wore it on a chain that was attached to his belt and it was still there!

"That was when I became panicky and ran. Everyone knew that I had the only other key and everyone knew, or thought they k n e w, that Professor Wayne and I were in love. And it was my gun that had killed him. What could they think but that I had done it?"

This time it was Benjy who stopped her. "What about that zipper case?"

"That contained the information I had taken out of the office. It's as vital as the things that were taken from the file."

"So that's why crew-cut wanted it," I said. "Have you ever seen him before?"

She shook her head. "No. The first time I saw him was this evening when he followed me from the theatre."

"How about a tall, dark man with cold eyes?"

She shook her head again.

"The point is," Benjy cut in, "who else besides you would have had the chance to kill Professor Wayne? And who else knew what was in that file?"

Marcia bit her lip. "There was only one other person who would have had the opportunity and I know he didn't do it!"

"How do you know?" Benjy insisted.

"Because he couldn't! He's George Conrad, a special assistant to Professor Wayne. He was the only other person who was in the office much. Even the janitor had to come during the day while we were there."

I could see that she was all talked out. There were little lines of tiredness around her eyes and her nerves had been stretched to the breaking point.

"You'd better get some sleep," I told her. "Maybe in the morning we'll be able to figure out something."

One thing I can say for Mrs. Benson's floor, it isn't much harder than her beds. Taking it all in all, Benjy and I managed to get a night's sleep. I don't know how Marcia slept but she was up when we awoke and she looked fresh as a daisy.

She handed us an eye opener. "I'm going to give myself up," she declared.

"That's the worst thing you could do," Benjy told her.

"Why?"

"Because as long as you're walking around with that zipper case the mob that stole the other papers and killed Wayne are going to stick around too. First of all, they want the papers you're carrying, and second, if they make you vanish it'll take the heat off them."

"You're not going to use her for bait!" I blurted. "Not on your life!"

"Have it your way," Benjy said calmly. "Let her turn herself in. She'll have a fat chance to prove she's innocent."

There was no way of getting around it. Both Marcia and I could see he was right.

"Okay, Holmes," I said, "you tell us what to do."

"The first thing to do is to get some breakfast."

SO I went out and gave Mrs. Benson a song and dance about Benjy having a headache and she fixed up another tray. Of course she had to ask me in what part of a wrestler's body he could get a headache but I'm used to cracks like that.

When we finished eating we felt better. "The thing to do now is to get down to the university and take a gander around," Benjy said.

"Swell idea," I told him. "You go ahead and Marcia and I will wait here until you get back."

"Listen, schlemiel," he barked, "the way that place must be swarming with coppers my face would be like waving a red flag in front of a bull! They couldn't resist pinching me."

"Of course all *I've* got to do is walk right in and tell them Miss Dunn sent me!"

Then we both sat and looked at Marcia and waited for her to come up with an idea.

She did her best but it was no use. "How about if I said I was your brother?" I suggested.

"They know I have no family because they investigated me thoroughly before I was hired. The only living relative I have is a cousin in the east whom I haven't seen in years."

"So you're her cousin!" Benjy said.

No one was more surprised than I when the gag worked. I must have walked a mile through the Gothic architecture of the university before I found the building I wanted. Then I went down corridors that just smelled of

science and high powered brains.

The few guys with flat feet and hard faces who belonged to the city were standing around trying not to get underfoot. If there was any investigating being done it was being handled by men whom I couldn't distinguish from the professors.

One of the hard guys stopped me. Although I was wearing my dark blue single-breasted suit there was still something about the shape of my ears and nose that must have told him I didn't belong.

"The gym is down at the end of the next block, bud," he said without seeming to open his mouth.

Wouldn't I love to get you in there for about twenty minutes, I said to myself. If he represented the force fairly then Benjy could have been the glamour boy on Homicide.

I tried to act nervous, which wasn't very hard. "I'm Marcia Dunn's cousin from New York," I told him. "I read about this in the papers and I wanted to find out all about it."

"Oh, you did, did you?" he grunted.

Just then a slim, intelligent looking fellow who was walking by and had heard what I said turned around and came back.

"I'll take over," he said quietly. You could see he was spoiling the city dick's fun but the hard guy stepped back out of the way.

"You say you're Miss Dunn's cousin?" the slim man asked me.

I nodded and he said, "Come along with me."

I FOLLOWED him down the corridor until we came to a door from which a sign saying Physics 105 had been removed. They might as well have left the sign on because the letters showed white against the dark door anyway.

The room was big, with venetian blinds all around and a couple of big blackboards with mystical equations on them. A door behind the desk at the front of the room led into another room that was smaller. Behind that was still another room and that was where we stopped.

There were several filing cabinets and one in particular I noticed because it was so solid looking. I knew then that I was in Wayne's office. I could also see how a shot might go unheard if both office doors were shut.

"Now, when was the last time you saw Miss Dunn?" the quiet voice asked.

"First I want to know who I'm talking to," I protested.

His voice didn't get one note higher. "I'll ask the questions; you just supply the answers."

"Okay. I haven't seen her in years. I was in town for a wrestling engagement last night and I saw her name and picture in the papers."

So far I was sticking close to the truth. When he asked my name I gave him the right one and showed him identification. But all the while I was trying to figure out how someone else could have opened that file if Marcia and Professor Wayne had had the only keys. I also wondered what this guy Conrad that she had mentioned looked like.

I didn't have to wait long. Someone came into the room behind me and the slim fellow said, "Hello, Conrad."

George Conrad looked more like a college professor than any man I had ever seen. He was tall and bony, with a long face that had a certain pleasant quality. He needed a haircut badly and his heavy rimmed glasses gave him the look of an owl who had been in the woods too long. His movements were vague, not as though he forgot things easily but rather as though he always had something very important on his

mind.

When he heard I was Marcia's cousin he insisted on shaking hands with me. The slim guy looked disgusted but didn't say anything. Both of them pounded me with questions that I didn't answer and after a while they gave up.

"Are you sure it was Marcia who did it?" I finally asked.

Conrad got white around the gills. "Hers were the only fingerprints on the gun," he said in a strangled voice.

Before I could ask any more questions he left. "I have to get back to the lab," he apologized.

Then a little shabby man with near sighted eyes and a straggly grey moustache came in with a feather duster and some cloths in his hands. The slim man and I went out into the corridor again.

"You can go now," he told me.

"But suppose I want to get in touch with you?" I asked, just to keep up my pretense.

"You won't have to," he said. "If we find her you'll read about it in the papers."

If anyone followed me he was too small to see, because I kept looking over my shoulder all the way to the street car and there were only some college boys and girls.

AT SIXTY-THIRD Street I got off and bought a morning paper to see if anything new had turned up that I didn't know about. By now the picture of Marcia was blown up twice the size it had been and there was even less writing under it. They were really looking for her! And they were still not giving out any dope.

It was while I was walking toward Harper that I got the feeling I was being tailed. After stopping to window shop in three different lobbies I finally spotted the man who was shadowing me.

And was I surprised! It was none other than the dark, fishy eyed man who had come up with the copper the night before. If he's so interested in me then I ought to be interested in him, I said to myself.

From there on I didn't look behind me any more. Taking it slow and easy I strolled along until I got to a building where there were a lot of offices and a deep lobby. He'd have to follow me in to make sure I wouldn't get out through another entrance.

He did. I went up two stairs of a flight that was hidden behind the elevators and waited there, and in a minute he walked by and threw a quick look in my direction.

Before he could duck back I came down behind him and I had him in a corner where he couldn't escape. If he had any ideas I didn't give him a chance to put them into practise.

"Hiya, pal!" I said in a jovial voice. Then I let my right hand fall across the back of his neck like some people do when they're being friendly.

I lowered my voice. "Make one wrong move, friend, and I'll squeeze that bump on your neck into applesauce."

He must have had his nerves in an icebox because all I got out of him as I marched him back the way we had come was a smile full of white teeth.

I kept my right hand on his neck and my left hand up front where I could swing it around in a hurry. "And don't reach for any cigarettes," I warned him as we went down the street like a couple of buddies.

That got me another smile. After we were a couple of blocks down there were few people around us and I felt him relax just the least bit under my hand.

"Well," he said then, "now that you have me what are you going to do with me?"

His voice was sort of furry and it

had a queer accent that I couldn't place easily. I once wrestled a guy named Maniu Andrescu who was a Hungarian and talked in a rougher, but similar, voice all through the match.

"I don't know," I admitted. "What would you do if you had me instead of it being the other way around?"

"Aha! In that case, my friend, I would talk business, not violence." The way he said it the word came out "wiolence".

"Let's talk business," I said.

As we talked we had been slowing down and now we came to a dead stop. I watched him intently as I waited for his next words.

"Good. Let us speak plainly. You would like to cheat your friends out of their share. That much is plain from your actions of yesterday evening. Meanwhile you and the girl and your fat associate are in possession of at least half of the formulae. Is that correct?"

I DIDN'T get a chance to answer that one. Like a fool I had let him get me so interested in his chatter that I didn't see the car stop ahead of us at the curb. Out of the corner of my eye I did see someone get out but I paid no attention to him until he was three feet away.

Another fellow must have got out of the car before it reached us because the first voice came from behind me.

"You will release him," the voice hissed.

The man before me had his hand in his pocket and the bulge it made was too big to be just a hand. I released the dark man.

"Now you will walk to the car and get in quietly," the voice ordered.

I went over to the car and got in as quietly as I ever do anything. It was a big grey Buick that had plenty of room for all of us. The one I had taken captive sat in the front with the driver, and the other two, who were as dark complexioned as he was, sat on either side of me. We didn't do any talking.

For perhaps ten minutes we drove. When we stopped it was before a house that was much like Mrs. Benson's except that there was no sign in the front window.

The driver turned around and covered me with a neat little automatic while the man on my right got out. Then the rest of them followed and I was marched up the front steps like a man on his way to the firing squad. And that's exactly how I felt.

Unfortunately there was no one else at home. It didn't look like there ever would be, either, because all the shades were down. We sat down in a room full of old fashioned mohair furniture and fish-eyes turned on the lights. I felt I had to say something.

"All right, now it's the other way around. What are you going to talk, business or violence?"

He smiled. "Always business, my friend. Since we know where only half the papers are we are forced to talk business. Of course, if we had been fortunate enough to have *our* people planted at the university . . ."

He said *people!* That meant more than one, and even if he was wrong about Marcia it still left at least one more. And that meant . . . Conrad! His long face and solemn air had sure made suckers out of everyone. I would have bet that he used to spell his name with a "K"!

"Go on," I urged, "I'm listening."

"Very well. We had expected you to get all the papers out at once. And then . . ."

"And then you would have hijacked them," I finished.

"Hijacked!" he snorted. "Must es-

pionage be d e g r a d e d by gangster terms."

"I'm sorry I offended you," I said. "But what that was the idea, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Now we know where Klaus is, but not where the girl and the fat man are. I was afraid to follow you last night. I hoped that Klaus would find you for me but he failed."

"So now you want me to double cross my pals. For how much?"

His eyes got very shiny. "For ten thousand dollars, shall we say?"

Being a wrestler has taught me a lot about acting and I did a good job of sounding scornful.

"Ten thousand? We're not talking about the plans for a new machine gun, friend!"

"We could be talking about a bullet hole in your head," he said quietly.

"That's violence. And it wouldn't get you anything, either. How would you find my pals without me?"

"Shall we double it then?"

I SHOOK my head in the negative and he started to sweat a little. I don't know how much he expected to get for the job but it looked to me like I was going to eat up most of his profit. His voice got hoarse.

"Fifty thousand!"

I saw that he couldn't be pushed much further so I nodded sharply. "Okay."

He let out a sigh and stuck his gun back in his pocket. Then he pulled out a piece of paper and a pencil and handed them to me.

"Not so fast," I told him. Let's see the color of your money before I do any writing."

I must have been doing a real professional job of acting like a tough spy because he reached in and got a wallet that was stuffed with bills. He just about emptied the wallet and threw the money beside me on the couch where I was sitting.

"Twenty thousand," he hissed. "The rest when we have all the papers."

"And now I write the address where my pals are. Then you go and get the papers and when you come back you pay me off and I beat it. Right?"

"Precisely," fish-eyes said.

"If I was that dumb I wouldn't wouldn't have been working with Klaus in the first place," I laughed.

His face got mean and I thought to myself, here comes the gun! But it didn't come; he held back until he cooled off a little. One of the others said something in a language I didn't understand and then added a few motions that I understood too well.

"Do I look like the kind of a guy who can be tortured into talking?" I asked. I tried to look as brave as I sounded.

"Unfortunately, no!" fish - eyes snapped. "Besides, we have not enough time. What is your proposition?"

"You and one of your pals can come with me. Three of us ought to be enough to handle one man and a girl. All the money will go with us in an envelope that I can mail to myself before we get to the place where they're hiding out."

It was take it or leave it and he had to take it even though it was giving him ulcers to do so. He barked something in his own language to the others and one of them brought in a large envelope and two thin bundles of brand new bills. I put all the money in the envelope and sealed it. Then I stuck the envelope in my pocket and stood up.

Fish-eyes and the driver went with me. The other two stayed in the room. Going back down that dark hall toward the light that showed under the shade on the door I felt much better than when we had come in.

As we came to the door I stopped as though I were waiting for one of them to open it. When it comes to doing something that they've done countless times before people react automatically, without thinking. That's just what fish-eyes and his pal did.

Each of them took his hand out of his pocket and reached for the doorknob. I don't think they ever knew what hit them, because just then I brought both my hands across with all my strength. Their heads made a noise like two cantaloupes hitting a wall as they smashed together.

I WAS straightening up with fish-eyes' gun when one of the boys came dashing out of the room to see what had happened. He found out too late for it to do him any good. Two holes in his chest were spurting blood as he crumpled to the floor.

There was still one man left and I couldn't afford to have him behind me. Not giving him a chance to get set I hurdled the body that blocked the doorway and was in the center of the living room even as he snapped his first shot through the opening.

Surprise made his second shot go wild and I didn't give him a chance to fire again. There were at least four shots left in my gun and I used them all. One of the bullets spun him around and made him drop his gun; another brought a groan from him and he fell toward a couch. If he wasn't dead yet he died a second later as I brought the butt of my empty gun crashing down on his head.

The brightness of fresh blood mingled with the faded red of the upholstery and the room was filled with the acrid odor of gunfire. I'm a wrestler, not a killer, and the sight of so much death was making my stomach turn, but luckily I didn't have time to think about it.

All I knew was that I had to get back to Benjy and Marcia. Now she could turn herself in because we knew who Klaus was and who his accomplice had been in the murder of Professor Wayne. I stopped just long enough to get the keys from the dead driver's pocket.

Half the mileage on the Buick's tires burned off as I braked to a squealing stop before our rooming house. It was a good thing that the front door wasn't locked because I wouldn't have taken the time to ring the bell and I didn't have my key with me.

"Benjy!" I yelled as I pounded down the hall. Without waiting for him to answer I pushed open the door of our room.

And both of them were gone! Like an idiot I stood peering around as though I expected them to be hiding under the bed or behind the wooden chair. The room was not disturbed; even the tray still stood on the dresser. There was no sign of a struggle. I said to myself, the cops got them, I hope.

"Reilly!" I'm not the nervous type but that shrill screech coming from behind me would have lifted me out of my shoes if they hadn't been tied so tightly.

It was Mrs. Benson and she didn't look motherly now. "You overgrown lummox! You and that gorilla have ruined me!"

Then she called me a few choice names that even I don't use and that would have shocked a judge in Morals Court. "Sneaking women in here! Getting my place raided like a common. . . ."

I put my hand over her mouth and held it until she quieted and some of the red went out of her face.

"Now tell me what happened," I said.

"What happened?" she cried. "If that detective hadn't been so nice I

could have been implicated myself. Harboring a criminal, he said."

"What detective? When did all this happen?"

"About an hour ago. They came in with their cigars stuck in their ugly faces and asked if you and Benjy lived here. When I said you did they pulled out guns and told me to open the door of your room. Then, right in front of all the neighbors, they marched Benjy and that . . . that girl . . . down the front stairs!"

"You mean they were city cops?"

"How do I know? I was so upset I hardly know what any of them look like, except that the one in charge had a scar on his face."

"Klaus!"

"I forgot to ask him his name," she said bitterly. "Now get your things and get out!"

"Later!" I yelled back over my shoulder as I dashed down the hall. I didn't hear the answer to that because I was going down the stairs already. But I can imagine.

ALL I knew was that I had to find Benjy and Marcia. Once Klaus had what he wanted he'd waste no time in getting rid of them. The worst of it was that, even as I pulled away from the curb, I realized I hadn't the faintest idea of where to find Klaus.

I was going to be in an awful jam when I told that quiet, slim man at the university what I had been holding out on him. If they didn't catch Klaus and his mob and get those papers back I was a cinch to spend a good chunk of my future using my strong back to break rock at a federal penitentiary. But if they couldn't save Benjy and Marcia I didn't care if they'd give me the Chinese water torture.

It was strictly a matter of luck that the faculty and student body of the university weren't drastically reduced as I roared through those tree lined streets. Two nice looking boys lost their books and almost their lives because they were blocking the door of the physics building.

And there wasn't a cop in sight! I grabbed a guy who looked like he belonged in those halls and pulled him to me.

"Where're all those coppers who were here before?" I demanded.

I had scared him so badly that he couldn't answer and I had to waste precious minutes assuring him that I had no designs on his life. Finally he stopped shaking.

"I . . . I don't know," he stammered. "They all ran about fifteen minutes ago."

"All?"

He nodded dumbly and my heart turned into an expanding ice cube that threatened to freeze up my throat and choke me to death. I tottered out of the building like a man who has lost his best friend, and Benjy was just that. Even Marcia and those vital papers were forgotten.

I couldn't have been sitting in the car more than four or five minutes when the old janitor came down the wide stone steps. He walked across the front of the car and went into the passageway between two frat houses on the other side of the street. My eyes followed him unseeingly.

Then I snapped out of it. Maybe the janitor knew who the slim guy was and where he had gone! It was worth a try anyway, so I jumped from the car and dashed toward the frat house.

He had gone clear through to the next block and was turning off as I entered the passage. "Hey!" I yelled.

He didn't seem to hear me because he kept right on going. I ran down that passage and across the narrow alley,

yelling all the way. By the time I had come out on the next street the janitor was almost a block away and moving faster than I thought a man his age could.

I hollered again and he looked back for an instant. Then he ducked out of sight between two buildings. That was all the yelling I was going to do because by that time I was sure he was more than an old, near sighted janitor! My God, there had been more foreigners than Americans working in that physics building!

THE space between those houses was narrow and I lost time squeezing through. I also lost the janitor; when I got to the next street the only one in sight was a little girl who was sitting on a step and singing her doll to sleep.

"Did you see an old man come through here a second ago?" I asked her.

She studied me for a few seconds, making up her mind whether she ought to tell or not. I rushed her by pulling out all my loose change and pouring it into her hand and she gave me a grin that had a lot of teeth missing from it.

"He went through there," she said, pointing her finger at a passageway across the street. I didn't stop to say thank you.

When I came out on the other side of that one I saw him. He was more than a block away, just starting down the stairs to a basement apartment. I found it to be one of those places where the door is stuck away under the stairway that goes up to the first floor. There were four stone steps leading down to a square concrete floor and I took them in one jump.

The door was closed so I gathered my strength and hurled myself against it. But it wasn't locked and the catch wasn't on.

The door swung out of my way like a matador's cape before a charging bull and I sailed headlong into the middle of the room. They were all ready for me; a bunch of starved cats lined up on both sides of a rat-hole, and they came in with their claws swinging.

"No shooting!" someone yelled.

There wasn't any shooting but I didn't really miss it because they threw everything else in the book at me. And a lot of stuff that comes under the heading of mayhem.

I put up a good fight. For a few minutes I gave as good as I got, and the sound of Benjy's voice calling encouragement was like a shot in my arm. There were too many of them, though, and finally they kicked my feet out from under me and got me on the floor and gave me the boots. Then something with the weight and power of a swinging beam landed against my head.

When I woke up I felt as though I had been through a mill with a couple of concrete mixers. I was sitting in a solid wooden chair, my arms and legs tied to it with thick rope. My mouth was salty and sticky from blood, and from the way it still ran from my nose I'd need a transfusion soon.

Marcia was tied to another chair and she was pale, but unharmed. Benjy was all in one piece but he must have put up a battle because his face gave me an idea of what I looked like. Crewcut had dusted himself off and was calmly smoking a cigarette. I figured he was Klaus.

There were three others in the room and they all looked mussed. One of them was a short, husky fellow who had one arm in a sling. He was the one who had caught the bullet the night before.

"Too bad you didn't get it in the guts," I snarled at him.

My voice came out muffled through

puffed lips but he caught the drift. He came over and handed me five solid knuckles at the end of his good arm. It felt like someone had put a hot poker to my mouth. Benjy let loose a string of curses at the short man and got the same return I had.

"Now will you keep your mouths shut?" Klaus asked icily.

It's too bad looks can't kill because I tried. But if Benjy and I ever got loose those guys had saved up enough fractures to keep them in bed until their beards grew down to their ankles.

JUST then the janitor came in from a back room. I didn't recognize him at first. He stood erect and he had shaved off his moustache and dyed his hair black. It made a difference of twenty years in his appearance. Rose tinted glasses softened his near sighted stare. He looked real pleased with himself.

"So you finally caught me," he said. "For a while I was afraid I'd lost you."

My mouth still hurt so I didn't say anything. Marcia figured they wouldn't hit a woman so she told them off without the use of four letter words. I could see that her words cut them like a bar of soft soap. After that no one said anything for a while. It was Klaus who broke the silence.

"You fellows came just in time for the last act." He spoke without a trace of accent. "Now you help to ring down the curtain."

I knew the answer but I had to ask anyway. "What are you going to do with us, Klaus?"

"So you know my name? You are much brighter than you look."

I tried to wipe the sneer off his face. "There are smarter guys than you or I on your trail! And they're going to catch up with you!"

"I think not. The 'janitor' was called home to a sick wife. They'd never suspect him. As for your question," he paused and spread his hands, "we shall have to kill all three of you of course."

"And when does the execution take place?" I wanted to know.

"As soon as it gets dark enough for us to leave. You don't have long to wait."

I wished that I was Joshua so I could keep the sun from going down. But I wasn't, and it hurt to think that Benjy and I would never see that chicken farm. Nor would Marcia, and that hurt too. I looked at her and she was taking it like a trooper. Her face was white but her chin still stuck out and I was proud of her.

Klaus and his men went into the back rooms of the basement apartment and left us alone with our thoughts. I guess they were getting their packing done because there was a lot of moving around back there. Then I looked at Benjy and he was pulling loose!

His neck was corded and his face was so red it looked like an overgrown tomato. There were creaking noises as the back of his chair began to separate from the seat. But the rope gave out first. One strand after another I could hear it going.

A COUPLE of billion years went by very slowly and at last Benjy's hands were free. It took only two billion more for him to untie his legs. Then he crawled over to me on his hands and knees and got to work on my ropes. The last one came untied just as Klaus and his buddies walked in again.

Like magic a gun appeared in his hand. "Stand where you are!" he barked.

Hell, how many times can you die anyway? Benjy and I rushed them.

If we were in our best shape we might have turned the trick. But those guys weren't playing around either, and every time one of them landed with his fist or a blackjack it slowed us up more. I went down first and Benjy fell on top of me and then we were being smothered in a pile of arms and legs and bodies.

Maybe there was noise when one of the windows shattered but I didn't hear it. Then there was a roar that sounded like a machine-gun and plaster came off the ceiling in big chunks and fell on us.

"Now get up!" a hard, quiet voice said.

The bodies rolled off Benjy and me and I looked at the window from which the voice had come. The glass was gone and in its place were the head and shoulders of the slim, quiet man. And a machine-gun was just what he had in his hands!

Then someone kicked down the front door and another man with a chopper came in. Benjy and I rolled so we wouldn't be between the guns and Klaus. He made a try anyway, snapping his gun up for a quick shot.

He didn't have a chance. The guy who had come in the door just about cut him in half with that machine-gun. The rest of us sucked in our breath with a kind of a sick sound and the room was full of fumes. I took another look at the expert marksman.

Without his glasses I had to admit that George Conrad looked more like a regular guy. I guess Marcia thought so too because she called his name like it was the only one she'd ever want to say.

More men piled in and took over while Conrad untied Marcia and kissed her enough to show he loved her. The slim man dropped through the window and walked over to me.

"Reilly," he said in his quiet way, "you would have saved yourself a lot of lumps if you had told the truth this morning.

"I'm content that you found it out for yourself," I told him. "How did you do it?"

"We put out a check on you and found out where you live while you're in Chicago. The amusement park gave us the information. I imagine that's how Klaus found you." He looked at one of Klaus' men for confirmation and got it.

HE WENT on. "Just as a part of the routine we sent a man to your rooming house. He got there a few minutes after you'd left and when he heard Mrs. Benson's description of the man who had taken Miss Dunn and Finkelstein away he called me immediately. We all rushed out there at once."

"That's just when I came looking for you at the university!" I said. "I was going to tell you that Conrad was the man you wanted!"

He looked ashamed. "Except for Conrad we were all positive that Miss Dunn was the culprit. We would never have suspected the janitor if not for the fact that he had disappeared by the time we got back. We found out that he had got a call that his wife was ill. Conrad looked up his application blank and found he didn't have a wife! That brought us out here in a hurry."

"And I thought Conrad was an absentminded professor," I grinned.

The "professor" laughed. "You're forgiven. You not only did your country a service but you also saved my job and Marcia's life."

"The slim man shook his head. "I don't know whether these two deserve a prison sentence or a medal for what they've done. I think we'd better call it a draw and forget the whole thing."

I really felt that we ought to get medals but I didn't feel too bad because I suddenly remembered the envelope in my pocket. I hauled it out and showed it to Benjy. "We'll get our chicken farm out of this anyway," I comforted him.

When I showed him what was in the envelope his eyes popped. "For fifty thousand dollars we can buy a ranch!" he crooned. "I'd almost be willing to go through it again."

The slim man reached out and pulled one of the bundles out of my hand and scrutinized the bills carefully. He looked up at me with a sad smile.

"If these had been printed on a government press they'd be good," he said. "As it is, I'm afraid we'll have to confiscate them."

I looked at him. There went the money. I looked at Marcia and she was smiling up at George Conrad. What did I have left? Lumps! Lumps and Benjy.

"Come on, Jim," Benjy was saying, "we've got a date in Des Moines tomorrow night."

At least I'm always sure of Benjy.

THE END

★ BONITA FLEET ★

THE bonita are very sacred fish to the Manu'ans. If any man has slept with a woman the night before he puts out to sea, he is contaminated, unclean and unfit to catch the sacred fish. So he is not allowed to ride with the fleet. The fish are wise and the bonita god would know; he would warn the rest of the fish. They would be insulted and the fleet would come home with empty boats.

When the signal drums beat at two-o'clock in the morning, the fishermen are aroused from sleep and all go down to the village lime pit. There are no hats in Manu'a, so before going to sea where the sun beats down unmercifully on their heads, the fishermen go to the lime pit and scrape up handfuls of wet lime and plaster it in their hair. It hardens like cement and can't be blown off. The shiny whiteness wards off the sun and it kills off animal life that might be there.

There are usually about forty canoes used in one fleet. Bonita boats are the swiftest craft in the South Seas. They are made of light planks, shaved down to cardboard thinness, and sewed together with tough coconut fiber cord. Their lightness makes them leap over the water as though they were about to take to the air. You must be about three hours out to sea by sun-up.

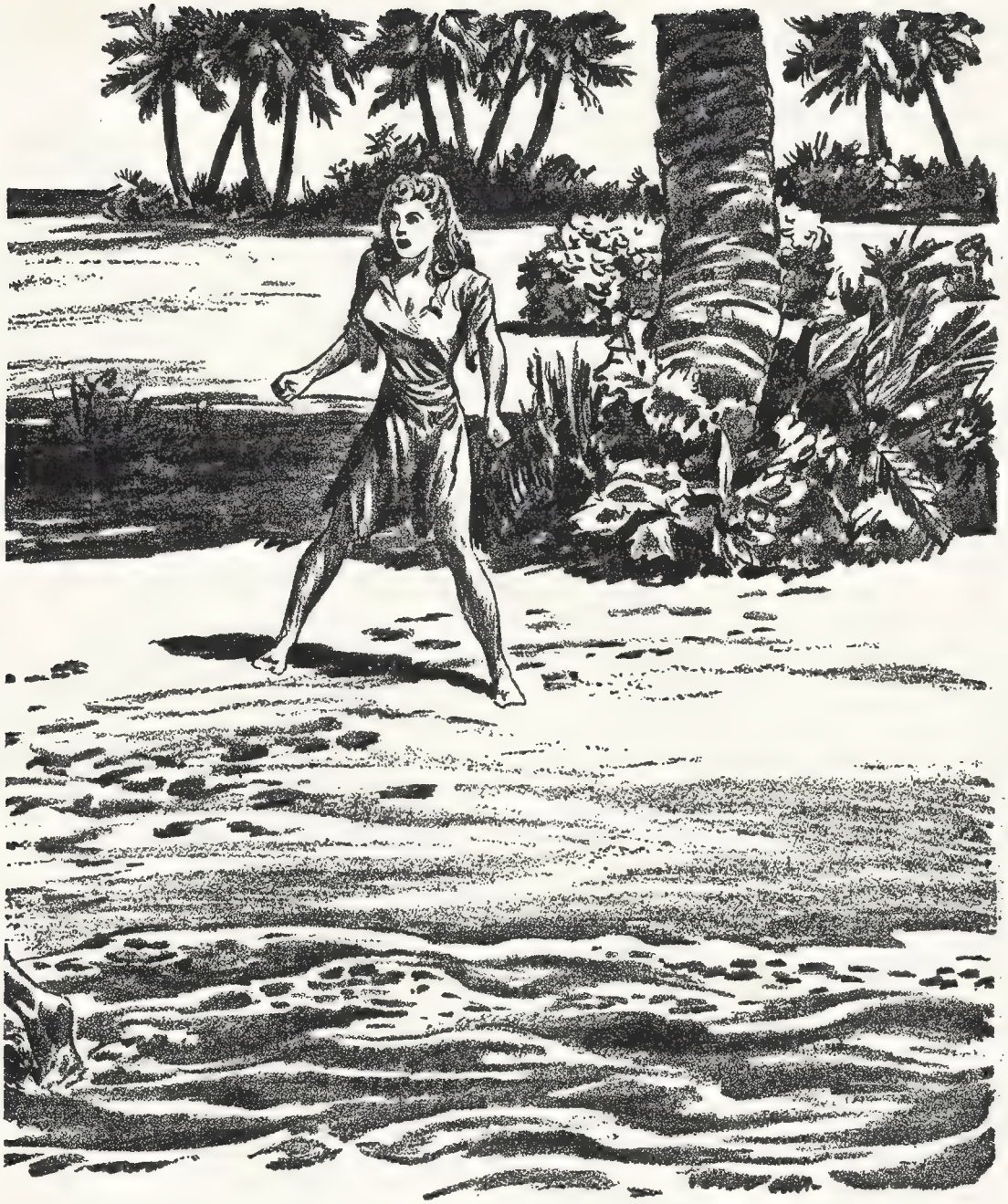
Bonita fish are something like salmon. They travel in huge schools way out from land. Their most deadly enemy is the sword-fish, who continually cruises around in search of them. When a school of bonita is found, they plunge in and kill right and left and don't bother to eat them till the chase is over and then they come back and eat their victims at their leisure. Panic-stricken, the bonita always come to the surface and the sword-fish keep them surrounded to kill as many as possible. The confusion on the surface is terrific as the water is lashed into foam. The sea birds hovering above are always on the look-out for some such sign as this.

THE captain of each canoe uses a fifteen foot pole and a long line from which dangles half a dozen pearl-shell fish hooks, shaped like small silver fish the bonita love to eat. They forget to be cautious and bite and with one heave of the pole, the fish is in the bottom of the boat. There are no barbs in the hooks, so without stopping the motion of the swing, you flip the hook out of the fish's mouth and back into the sea to be seized by other milling fish almost before it strikes the water. Soon the bonita scatter in every direction and there is not a single one to be seen. And the sword-fish eat the dead fish that are floating around the surface. With canoes full and settled deep in the water, you turn toward home. The head fisherman leads prayers of thanks to the god of bonita. There is much joking and laughter. The purpose of conversation is to fool the bonita. Bonita are such sacred fish and are believed to be so intelligent they can understand everything that is said about them. Therefore, if the fishermen ever hinted that they were catching the fish to eat, the god of bonita would be angered and would never allow his subjects to be caught by them again. So the fishermen openly speak as if they had caught all the fish merely to take them home and turn them loose in a huge mythical fish pond behind the village and they would be fed the best food and never again be molested by sword-fish. As soon as the fleet puts out to sea every female must go inside her house and pull her shutters, and remain quiet, without eating, sleeping or working. This is so they will not attract attention of the bonita who might look up into the village from the sea. If the bonita should see a woman while the fleet is out, they would be insulted by her unclean femininity and would grow suspicious of the fishermen and the fleet would come home without a bite. This is never permitted to happen by concealing the women.—*Frances Yerxa.*

CAVERN'S END

By C. A. Baldwin

You can't tell by the looks of a man what he is—but when the going gets rough, watch him



"IT'S BEEN a grand cruise so far, Jimmy. But, if we keep getting this kind of balmy weather, it's going to make me so lazy that I won't even want to get out of a deck chair."

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders and answered, "Oh, it's okay, I guess, but it's too damn monotonous for me. I'll take the big town with its hotels and bars, good food and night clubs."

Jean raised her head and looked at Jimmy. A worried frown creased her

forehead. "Is that all you want out of life, Jimmy? Don't you ever get the desire to do anything but sit in bars and night clubs?"

"Hey! Wait a minute." Jimmy was laughing as he spoke. "You're not going serious on me."

"Boy, I can just get a picture of me reporting to the office every morning, getting my brow wet with honest sweat and plodding home every night to spend a rollicking few hours with the children, a nice book in front of a crackling fire and then off to bed when the clock chimes ten." Jimmy finished his monologue and laughed.

Jean flushed. "Don't be an ass, Jimmy. You know that isn't what I meant. But, it wouldn't hurt you to spend some time at business and make an effort to earn part of your salary."

Jimmy got a bit nettled, "All right, Jean, what put a bee in your bonnet? You know the kind of things that I like and I know what you enjoy. I don't intend to interfere with your life, so the same thing should go both ways."

Jean forced a laugh and replied, "Okay, Jim, I'm sorry. But, every once in a while I get a little peeved when I see our whole crowd just sliding through life, taking everything out of it and putting nothing into it.

"Perhaps I've just got too darn much nervous energy, but for the last few days, I've wanted to do something that I could really call work. Sometimes I actually feel like going down into the boiler room, or, whatever you call that place where the engines are, and scooping some coal into the fire. I don't know, maybe I'm just a little whacky."

Young Reynolds broke into laughter. "Wow, what a yarn that would make for the society column. 'Beautiful Deb Turns Stoker' would make a juicy headline for that bunch of Park Avenue cats."

"Speaking of stokers, I could use another one right now. Either one of you want to volunteer?" Captain Bobbs, short, stout, good natured skipper of the Reynolds' yacht had come up behind them and in the midst of their half-hearted argument neither one of them had heard his approach.

Jean laughed good naturedly. "Well, I'll tell you, Captain. If I packed about about fifty more pounds on this frame and if my lily white hands were a bit on the tough side, I'd take you up on that proposition."

Then she added, "What's the trouble, Captain? Are you really short handed?"

"Well, yes and no," the captain answered. "Here's the situation. Three of our stokers got into a brawl in some dive while we were anchored in Honolulu, smashed the place up and manhandled a couple of native policemen. So, all three are now parked in a nice, comfortable jail where they'll stay rent-free for the next three months."

"Couldn't you pick up some new stokers around the dock before we left?" Reynolds asked.

"Well, we did round up three, but that didn't solve the problem. One of them came aboard drunk and has been in a drunken stupor for the past two days.

"He smuggled some of that native hootch aboard and I'll be damned if I can find where he hid it. So, just about the time he starts to sober up, he has another bout with the bottle and then the whole thing starts all over again. On top of that, even when he's half-way sober he's a surly customer."

"I'd like to help you out, Captain, but, I don't believe that I'd make a very good stoker. But, now I've got a request to make of you."

"Go ahead, Miss Jean," the captain answered, "if it's something I can do,

it will be done."

"You'll think it's crazy," Jean replied, "but, Id like to see something of this boat besides the dining room, the lounge and the sundeck. I've been on this boat for three weeks and I don't even know what makes it go. I'd like to go down and watch the stokers."

"You're crazy, Jean," Reynolds broke in. "Isn't it hot enough on the deck without going down into that sweltering hole?"

Captain Bobbs said, "Okay, Miss, I'll even take you on a personally escorted tour and show you what keeps the boat moving."

Jean turned to Reynolds, "Come along, Jimmy, so you can hold on to me in case I start falling into any of the machinery."

Reynolds' masculine vanity was pleased by Jean's effort to be friendly, and consented to keep her company on her silly idea. So, with the captain leading them they started down the several decks of the Lido and soon the hiss of steam, the noise of smoothly driven wheels and pistons and the scraping of the stokers' shovels reached their ears.

The captain threw open a final door and a blast of heat met them as they stepped into the room. The three fire doors were open and the stokers were feeding coal into the furnaces with a smooth, untiring rhythm. Three stokers were at work, and a fourth, on relief, sat with his back against a stanchion and watched the others at their labors.

"I see our drunken friend has finally come out of his stupor. That's him over at the end fire on your left." The captain motioned in the general direction.

Jean had a natural curiosity and her gaze unconsciously followed the sweep of the captain's hand. Reynolds looked around with sort of good natured contempt.

The man that Jean was staring at was far from a pleasant sight. He was stripped to the waist and the grime and dirt that covered the upper half of his body wasn't only the result of the coal he was throwing into the fire. A thick growth of beard covered his face almost completely. His pants were in tatters and his shoes were split in several places, particularly the left one, from which the front part had been either completely torn or rotted away.

Perhaps that human wreck sensed that they were talking about him, or, he had seen the captain's arm wave in his direction, but, at any rate, he banged his shovel to the floor, straightened up from his half crouch and stared directly at Jean.

Jean's stomach turned over as the man stared straight into her eyes. His eyes were merely rims of red from which poured a naked torrent of hate and contempt. For a long moment Jean returned the stare of the brute, then shuddered involuntarily and quickly averted her eyes. The stoker's glance skipped the captain and came to rest on the immaculate, white flannel pants of Reynolds. The corner of his mouth turned up and then with a shrug of his shoulders to show his contempt he started to throw small mountains of coal into the hungry fire.

The captain had seen the silent display of hate and gently pushed Jean to the door.

As the door closed behind them, the Captain said, "Our friend doesn't seem to like you. He's an animal—makes me feel like he'd be at my throat if I took my eyes off him for a second."

"Ugh," Jean said. "That big ape has the meanest eyes I've ever seen in any human. He looks like he'd actually enjoy slitting my throat."

"What do you expect from the dregs?" Reynolds said. "If they weren't morons, they wouldn't be scooping coal into a fire for a living. I hope you've seen enough to satisfy your crazy curiosity, because I've seen more than I want and besides it's too damn hot down here. I'm going up on deck and cool off with a tall drink. You look like you could stand a drink yourself."

Jean had seen enough. In fact, she had seen more than enough, for the actions of the ugly tempered coal passer had upset her more than she cared to say.

CHAPTER II

As they came up on the sun deck to join the rest of their party, they were immediately aware of the atmospheric change that had set in since their brief absence. A quivering haze was dimming the lowering sun. The warm, gentle breeze that had been blowing was entirely stilled and a hot, dead calm seemed to have thrown a thick blanket of silence over everything. The water had settled to a flat, dead expanse of gray and as the speeding yacht cut through, it seemed to part reluctantly in front of the sharp prow and then roll sullenly away.

Jean was startled by the sudden change and her voice held a trace of anxiety as she asked, "Are we in for a storm, Captain?"

For a few moments Captain Bobbs did not reply as he stared fixedly at the dull, leaden sky to the south. "A storm? Yes—I guess we're going to have quite a blow." The Captain's voice was quiet as he continued to stare at the angry sky.

A seaman hurried over to the little group. "The latest barometer reading, Captain, and the Mate asks that you join him on the bridge."

The Captain's eyes dropped to the bit of paper as the seaman turned away. His lips seemed to tighten a trifle as he rolled the paper into a small ball and flipped it over the rail. "You'll have to pardon me now. This is going to be a stiff blow and I want to be ready."

Reynolds broke the momentary silence that followed the Captain's departure by saying, "Well, even a good storm is all right. It might give us a little excitement."

"I'm a bit frightened, Jimmy. I've never seen anything like this before. Even Captain Bobbs seemed worried."

"Don't work yourself into a stew, Jean. There's no danger."

"Yes, but—"

Jean's words were cut short by the pealing of a bell.

"That's dinner," Reynolds said. "Let's go. I'm hungry as a bear."

"I've got to make a quick change," Jean answered. "I've been in these clothes all day. See you in a few minutes."

Reynolds and Jean arrived in the dining room almost simultaneously. The senior edition of the Reynolds family and all his guests were already heated around the table as the young couple walked in. The Captain's chair was still vacant.

Dinner was an oppressive affair. The heat had penetrated into the ship and tiny rivulets of perspiration coursed down the faces of the diners as they picked at their food with an obvious lack of appetite. Conversation from the usually gay group was almost nonexistent. The heavy atmosphere seemed to have sapped even the small amount of energy needed for light conversation. Jimmy Reynolds was the only one of the group who had retained any semblance of an appetite.

The group had almost finished when

Captain Bobbs walked in and seated himself after the barest kind of a preoccupied nod. A heavy frown creased his forehead and every few seconds his glance would travel out the window to study the darkening intensity of the skies.

Finally he must have felt the weight of their concentrated stares and a corner of his mouth turned up in a half-hearted smile as his eyes swept the people.

Bobbs broke the silence. "There's no use trying to hide this from you. We're in for something. And, I say something because I frankly don't know what the hell is blowing up.

Young Reynolds stopped eating long enough to look up and say, "Forget the build-up Bobbs. We've all been through these tropical storms before and we don't scare worth a damn."

Captain Bobbs flushed through his weatherbeaten skin and directed his next remark at Jim's father. "Mr. Reynolds, if you are satisfied about the kind of captain's certificate that they give to All-American football players, I'll be very happy to turn command of the vessel over to your son."

An angry flush crept over Jim's face. He was halfway out of his chair with hot words trembling on his lips but they were stopped by Bobbs who turned towards the others and said, "This storm is going to hit us damned soon. I said before that I don't know what it is and I don't know how long it is going to last."

"I suggest that you have the steward clear away the dinner and that you all stay right in here. I'll be up on the bridge if you want me for anything." Captain Bobbs turned and walked away.

Young Reynolds dropped into his chair, silenced. The eyes of the rest of the group automatically switched to the windows. For a long few moments there was complete silence as they stared at the awesome sky. The black, sullen clouds seemed to be scudding along at almost water level and then as they came closer, complete blackness fell as suddenly as if someone had thrown a dark cloth over the window.

A high-pitched wail startled the small group. It was almost like the screech of a mortally wounded animal. A few faces blanched at the eerie sound and the tenseness became so thick that it could have been cut with a knife.

Hell broke loose with a blast that shook the yacht to its very fibres. The wail broke into a thousand screeching furies and in the next few seconds mounted to a deafening roar. The blast hit the yacht directly from the front. The forward progress of the boat seemed to stop and it shook as if it had received a mighty blow from an unseen, giant hand.

The first solid wall of water hit the yacht and the noise became terrific as the water smashed across the decks and crashed into the cabins. Then the bottom of the ocean seemed to fall out from under the Lido as it righted itself and slid down into the depths of the next giant wave. It seemed to stand almost on end as it struggled to climb to the top of the next roller.

Dishes and other dining utensils crashed to the floor. Chairs, occupied and empty went flying. Jean was thrown violently to the floor and ended up against the wall with a breath-taking jolt. Cora Reynolds pitched backwards, her head striking the sharp end of the table as she fell. In another moment all of them had been knocked to the floor and were being tossed about as if they were feathers in the grip of a big wind.

"Don't try to get up," roared James Reynolds. His voice sounded faint over the howl of the wind.

Then Reynolds saw that his wife had been knocked out by the blow on her head and he started crawling in her direction. Jean and young Reynolds followed him and all three of them were sent sprawling several times before they reached her side.

Blood had already started to seep through Cora's thick hair and her body had gone completely limp. It was rolling violently with each pitch of the boat. Reynolds leaned over her. Jim sensed that Cora had been badly hurt and wrapped a finger around her wrist to catch the pulse beat. His fingers shifted frantically. His face started to go white as he realized what had happened.

Jim shot a glance at his father who was vainly but vigorously rubbing Cora's wrists. Panic had gripped him and he did not realize the futility of his action. Jim lowered Cora's arm across her breast and then reaching across the still form he released her other hand from his father's vain manipulations. His father's frantic eyes strove to meet Jim's—Cora was dead.

Jim's hard eyes softened as they met his father's. Tears welled into the elder Reynolds' eyes and then giving vent to his grief he buried his face in his hands.

Jim crawled around the lifeless body and threw his arm across his father's shoulders. The rest of the group with the exception of Jean were stunned into immobility as they realized the significance of the pantomime. Cora's body released from the grip of the two men again started to roll from the impact of the waves. Quickly Jean grabbed cushions that had been thrown to the floor and wedged them on each side of the body to stop its ghastly motions.

The fury of the storm had mounted while death was striking. The wind was an inferno of sound and the impact of the waves had become constant blows of a giant hammer. The yacht shivered and shook from stem to stern with each blow and each time it seemed as if the Lido could not possibly withstand another one of the furious waves. Then the group with the exception of Jim, his father and Jean huddled together as the presence of death chilled their souls and the violence of the storm sent their courage to lowering depths.

At that moment the door was flung violently open and Captain Bobbs and another man lunged into the room. Both men had their arms filled with life preservers. Another huge wave hit the boat and Captain Bobbs was knocked from his feet while preservers went skidding across the room.

The captain hit the floor just a few inches from Cora's body and as he started to raise himself to his knees his eyes were caught and held by the dead white face and the blood that had seeped from Cora's head and on to the floor. Bobbs didn't have to be told that she was dead.

But, Bobbs didn't have time to spend in condolence. He had come on urgent business. Quickly he turned to the group and motioned them toward him. They crawled towards him as hastily as they could.

For a few moments Captain Bobbs was silent as if waiting for the fury of storm to abate. Then in words that he was roaring but which could only be faintly heard over the storm he said, "The Lido can't stand much more of this. She's going to split wide open any minute."

"Both of the life boats have been smashed. Put on these preservers and be ready for anything. We're already taking water below."

The sailor who had followed Bobbs into the room had already left after flinging his arm load of preservers to

the floor. The captain heaved himself to his feet and also turned to leave after once more looking at Cora's lifeless form. Just as he reached the door another giant wave hit the boat. The crash of water was like the clap of thunder as the boat shuddered violently. Then there was a tearing sound and the crunch of splintering timber.

Wave after wave crashed into the wounded Lido and with each one there followed the sound of vital destruction. Then a tremendous wall of water hit the fighting ship. The Lido could stand no more. It broke apart exactly in the middle.

Tons of water buried the boat, came plunging into the exposed room and swept its occupants into the black, raging elements.

Jean's head hit against the rail as the water carried her over it. She was stunned only momentarily as she went plunging into the black depths of the ocean. The preserver abruptly halted her downward progress and then rapidly shot her toward the surface. She had time for only one gulp of air and then another comber broke over her and once more she was buried beneath the water.

Jean fought violently to keep herself riding the waves instead of being buried beneath their mass, but her efforts were puny against the mountains of water that were being hurled at her by the screaming wind. Her strength ebbed rapidly and she was gulping mouthsful of water as she desperately tried to breathe each time she surfaced. Her body was taking a terrific battering.

The last bit of strength ebbed from her arms and her mind was mercifully dulled by the crashing blows of the water. All conscious movements of her arms and legs ceased.

A brief flicker of consciousness returned to her. She sensed rather than saw a black mass passing close beside her. She grabbed in desperation, missed, and then another surge of massed water drove her with terrific impact against the very object at which she had snatched. A blinding flash of light and pain surged through her head and then she blacked out completely.

CHAPTER III

Jean's return to consciousness was a painful process. It seemed as if someone was beating at the back of her head with a hammer. A hot light burned its way through her closed eyes and accentuated the pain in her head. Aches and pains shot through her body as she struggled through her lethargy.

The sudden movements sent another surge of blinding pain through her head and wrenched a groan from her lips. She felt an arm go around her shoulders and then a voice say, "Take it easy, girl." She forced her eyes open and saw Captain Bobbs kneeling besides her. Her body leaned gratefully against the curve of his arm.

Her blurred vision cleared as she saw Jim Reynolds kneeling besides the captain. Some distance away she saw three more men whom she subconsciously realized were the stokers that she had seen below the decks of the Lido. A wave of nausea caused by the pain passed and slowly she left the protection of the captain's arm and supported herself in a sitting position.

She managed a weak smile as she looked at Jim and said, "Who fished me out? I remember something hitting me on the head and then—"

Captain Bobbs said, "That was a life raft that clipped you. Jim and I were thrown into the water next to a raft that had been stored on the upper deck for emergency purposes. And just then

a flash of lightning and Jim spotted you! He grabbed you by the hair just as we were floating away from you and then the two of us dragged you up."

"I guess you'll be all right now, but, the others, I'm afraid—"Jim finished the sentence with a shrug of his shoulders and a wave of his hands.

"Jim," cried Jean, "you don't mean that they—they—"

"What else is there to think?" Jim asked. "The three of us and the three stokers over there were just lucky to live. There isnt the slightest sign of the others and it's just too much to hope that they were washed ashore—alive."

A lump grew in Jean's throat and her eyes misted. Captain Bobbs thought he recognized the signs of hysteria and tried to distract her attention. "Look Jean." His finger pointed seaward. "There's all that's left of the Lido."

Jean's eyes followed the captain's finger. On a reef some two hundred yards out lay the two battered halves of the Lido. The yacht had found a final resting place almost at the same spot where the freakish storm had washed the survivors ashore.

The captain added: "As soon as we're rested we'll take a trip out there and see if there's anything in the way of food and supplies that we can salvage. I don't have any idea where we're at and it may be sometime before we're picked up off this island."

Jean's courage sank as the significance of the captain's remark reached her. She laughed, trying not to show her dismay.

"I'll elect myself cook, Captain. And, if you and the rest of the men can survive my cooking I think that we'll live long enough to be rescued."

Bobbs and Jim laughed at her attempt at humor and then the captain said, "When we get out to the yacht I'll see if there are any navigation instruments left in working order so I'll be able to get some idea of just where we're at."

The three stokers started walking toward them and Jean felt an unexplainable surge of uneasiness as she thought of the vicious looking one she had seen in the ship. The prospects of being marooned with a whiskey-sodden moron was frightening. As the three stokers drew closer, Jean heaved an unconscious sign of relief when she saw that he was not one of the three.

As they came to a halt in front of Captain Bobbs, Jean saw that they represented the lowest type of humanity, not far above the calibre of the one that had made her shudder just by looking at her. One had evidently been appointed as spokesman as he stepped a pace forward to address the captain. He was a brute of a man. A black stubble of a beard only partially concealed the scar that ran from his ear and disappeared into the very corner of his mouth. It gave him a villainous expression and the muscles that bulged beneath his tattered sleeves showed the power that was packed into his giant body.

The huge stoker didn't waste words. "Where we at?" His words were almost a demand rather than a question and both Jim and Jean noticed that he had omitted the customary "Captain" or "Sir."

Evidently Bobbs, too, noticed the omission as he stared at the man for a few moments before replying. "The only thing that I can tell you at the moment, Blacky, is that I think we're on an island. In fact, I'm sure of it because there was no mainland within two hundred miles of where we were when the storm blew up.

"If there are any navigating instru-

ments left on the yacht I'll be able to give you more information later," the captain concluded.

"What chance we got of getting off?" With a flush Jean noticed that the stoker wasn't looking at he Captain as he was talking. His slit eyes has shifted to her and Jean saw that her dress had been almost entirely ripped away at the shoulder, leaving it and the graceful swell of her breast exposed. Rapidly she pulled up the tattered remnants of the dress.

Captain Bobbs caught the by-play and immediately asserted his authority. "Listen to this, Blacky, and remember it. We go by the ship rules here. I'm still the captain and these are my passengers. You're not to talk to them, even look at them unless they talk to you first. Got it?"

The stoker glared at the captain with hate in his eyes. His huge fists were clenched and for a moment it looked like he was going to use them. But, finally his gaze broke, and his eyes lowered. Unconsciously he still admitted the captain's authority. He turned and walked off, The other two followed him.

Jean thrilled at the little captain's courage and in turn was somewhat disgusted with Jim who had backed away a few feet. Jean also noticed that his face had turned several shades paler.

The captain's eyes followed the retreating trio until they reached a grove of trees several hundred feet away and had disappeared into the thick foliage. Then he said, "I'm afraid we're going to have trouble with them unless we get picked up from here pretty quick. That Blacky is a bad customer and the half-breed is just as bad. The third one is just a marijuana hound, but, he'll follow the lead of the other two."

"Oh, I don't think they'll really make any trouble, Bobbs," Jim said. "You saw how quick he backed up."

"I hope you're right, Jim, but I still don't like it. Anyway, let's forget about it. I'm getting hungry and we've got to think about getting some food and fixing up some kind of a place to sleep."

Then turning to Jean, the captain continued, "Do you feel up to making a trip out to the Lido on the raft? We've got to see if we can salvage something and I don't want to leave you here alone."

"Count me in, Captain," Jean answered.

"Okay. But first we've got to find something to use for paddles. Jim you go down the beach in that direction and I'll go up this way. See if you can find some wreckage that will serve for a paddle." Bobbs turned immediately and strode off toward the beach.

Jim hesitated for a moment, motioned to Jean to follow him and then walked off in the opposite direction.

Jim stooped and picked up a piece of planking. "This will do," he said. "And, this looks like it was torn off the Lido. It's still clean and it isn't water-soaked." Jean saw another similar piece just a few feet away and pointed it out to Jim.

Jim called to the Captain and the three of them started walking toward the raft that had been pulled ashore a few yards away. The captain and Jim pulled it to the water's edge and another few seconds the raft was on its way to the Lido.

At last the raft bumped against the side of the Lido. The huge yacht rested on the reef which was covered by only several feet of water.

"Jean, you'll have to stay on the raft and hold on the Lido's railing. Jim and I will try to get inside. If we have any luck we'll find some canned food and other supplies that we're going to

need." The captain jumped into the shallow water and was followed immediately by Jim.

The two halves of the Lido lay side by side and Captain Bobbs selected the forward part of the yacht for investigation. Bobbs and Jim inched their way up the steeply sloping deck and in a few moments disappeared through the door leading to the lower deck.

Jean kept the raft alondside the Lido by holding to an exposed portion of the railing. It wasn't difficult as the water was merely rippling and lapping gently against the edges of the raft.

"Jean!" Captain Bobb's head was sticking out of the doorway. In one hand he was straining to hold a large, heavy box and with the other he was holding on to the door so he could keep his footing on the precariously slanting deck.

"Jean, I'm going to lower this box to you. See if you can swing it so that it'll drop on the raft." Bobbs lowered the box with a strong rope and in a few seconds the box bumped on the floor of the raft. For the next fifteen minutes Jean was kept busy guiding the boxes and loose supplies that the Captain and Jim were rapidly bringing up from under decks of the Lido.

Finally the captain indicated that they had enough for the time being and both he and Jim dropped into the water and then clambered aboard the raft. In a few minutes they hit the beach and the two men worked rapidly in getting the salvaged supplies on a high spot. Blankets were spread out to dry on the hot beach. A miniature mountain of canned foods were spilled out of the boxes. Jean sighed with relief when she spied a revolver and several boxes of shells. It gave her a feeling of security.

The men worked steadily in an effort to fashion a rough campsite before night-fall. They built a rough lean-to out of salvaged canvas and heavily leafed branches.

As the sun began to lower, Bobbs lit a fire and laughingly said, "Okay, girl, you take over from this point. The two working men are hungry." While the men rested, Jean hurriedly opened cans of meat, potatoes and fruit. One of the boxes had contained several pounds of coffee and Jean boiled some of the grounds in a rescued but battered pot.

The food tasted good to the hungry trio. Just as they were finishing their meal, Blacky walked out of the grove of trees and approached the fire.

"How about letting us have some of that stuff." He indicated the canned foods. "We'll take the raft and get our own stuff tomorrow." Blacky's voice was polite but his eyes were still burning and again waves of uneasiness swept over Jean.

"Help yourself, Blacky," Captain Bobbs answered. "That food is community property. I think it would be a good idea for you to go out tomorrow and see what else you can get off the Lido because I think we're going to be here for some time."

Jean was startled. "What do you mean, Captain?"

"I mean," answered Bobbs, "That I don't know where we're at. The navigating instruments are smashed and there's no way I can determine our location.

"The only thing I can say is that I know there's no island like this one in the shipping lanes so I think we're here for a stay unless some ship accidently and by sheer good fortune should come this way."

Blacky took the captain's words with a frown, picked up on armful of cans and strode back into the sheltering trees. Jean and the two men lapsed

into a moody silence as night cast its shadows over the island.

Blacky and the two stokers took the raft in late afternoon and made three trips. Each time they returned the raft was heavily laden. Captain Bobbs invited them to place their supplies in a community pool, but Blacky acting as if he hadn't even heard the captain simply turned his back and marched off in the direction of the grove. The captain flushed, but didn't seem inclined to make an issue of it.

After the evening meal, the three of them sat around the fire. The two men exchanged little conversation and Jean added nothing as she sat listening to the million noises of the wildness.

The glow of the stoker's fire could be seen from their own campsite. The stokers had been silent all day but now their voices grew in volume very suddenly. In a few more minutes they started to sing. Their voices as rough as their looks gave emphasis to their obscene songs.

The darkness concealed Jean's blushes as the filthy words reached her ears. The captain seemed on the verge of paying the stokers an official visit but suddenly relaxed and, "They've been drinking. I'll only start trouble if I try to talk to them."

"Drinking," echoed Jim, "Where in the— I guess they must have found the liquor on the *Lido*. There was plenty of it on board."

"That's right," said Bobbs. "I should have thought of that and emptied the stuff into the water. Those wharf rats can start a lot of trouble if they've got enough of the stuff."

The ribald singing continued for a long time and then gradually died away as the stokers seemed to drink themselves into a drunken stupor.

The third day was a monotonous repetition of the first and second. The sun shone with a muggy, stiffling heat.

It was later afternoon before the stokers aroused themselves from their orgy of the previous night. However, it wasn't long before Blacky and his two asociates were shouting and quarreling among themselves. Their whiskey-sodden voices grew louder and louder as they continued drinking with increased intensity. Several times Jean saw the Captain look significantly at Jim, but his only reply was a shrug of his shoulders and a gesture toward the gun the Captain had found on the Lido and which was now strapped around his waist.

The stokers had gone strangely quiet. Only snatches of songs were heard and an occasional guffaw of laughter.

There wasn't a moon that night and the blackness outside the ring of light made by the fire was like a curtain of pitch. The blacker the night grew the uneasier Jean became.

A loud voice startled her. It was Blacky.

"I got some questions to ask ya." His voice was plain ugly.

Captain Bobbs sensed trouble but tried to make his voice sound jovial. "All right, Blacky. Come on over by the fire and sit down."

Blacky walked directly toward the Captain and when Bobbs saw that he had no intention of sitting down, he instinctively got to his feet.

"What's on your mind, Blacky?" He tried to keep his voice level, but Jean knew that he, too, sensed trouble.

"What chance we got of gettin' outta here?"

"I don't know. I told you that before. We may be here two days, two weeks, or—two years.

"Ain't you gonna do somethin' about it?" Blacky's voice was getting meaner by the moment.

Bobbs made one more effort to con-

trol the situation and avert trouble. "That's enough out of you. I'm still captain here and I'll be the one to give orders and ask the questions. Now —get out!"

Blacky's hand drew back and his giant fist hurtled forward—and then stopped abruptly as Bobbs raised his own hand—with a gun in it.

"That's mutiny, Blacky, and I could kill you for it. Next time I will. Get out!"

Beads of sweat glistened on Blacky's forehead and his giant fists kept opening and closing. His eyes spit hate and his whole body shook as he tried to keep himself from lunging at the Captain.

Slowly his body seemed to relax and then turned jerkily as if someone was twisting him around.

With a sigh of relief the Captain lowered the gun—a fatal mistake. Blacky anticipated the Captain's reactions. He whirled and leaped in the same motion. A long knife gleamed in his hand as he hurtled through the air. The surprised Captain's gun hand was only half raised when the plunging's giant's swinging fist knocked it down. The other hand drove the knife deep into the Captain's stomach and twisted the hilt savagely.

Jean's sight was veiled in a red mist as her senses started to reel at the gruesome spectacle. Only vaguely did she see the headlong rush that Jim made at the stoker. Then with a low moan she collapsed.

Blacky wrenched at the knife as he saw Jim come hurtling at him, body low to the ground as he attempted to knock the giant stoker off his feet. The knife wouldn't come free and Blacky turned to meet the charging Jim with his bare hands. He side stepped and Jim went sprawling past the Captain's body.

Frantically Jim clawed at the sand in his eyes expecteding every moment to feel the hot bit of steel in his back. Instead, all he heard was the derisive laugher of the burly stoker.

Blacky was still standing in the same spot, knife in hand and his huge chest heaving from the violence of his laughter. From the corner of his eye Jim saw that the other two stokers had put in an appearance.

He was just on the point of making a wild dash into the darkness when his eyes fell upon the unconscious form of Jean. A quick rush of anger overcame his natural desire to run.

Slowly Jim started to advance. The other two stokers came crowding in but stopped abruptly when Blacky waved them back. In a gesture of contempt, Blacky threw the knife to the sand. He walked with a pantherish grace.

"I'm comin' Lacey Pants. I'm gonna smash you to a pulp with my bare hooks."

After taking a step backwards Jim, as if in retreat, suddenly and with tremendous speed lunged at the stoker. As he sprang, his right arm curved in a huge arc and crashed home against Blacky's jaw. Two more punches thrown in rapid succession smashed into the stoker's face.

Jim knew the power in those punches. He expected to see Blacky slump to the ground and could only stare in amazement when Blacky merely shook his head from side to side. Then Blacky's mouth split in a ghastly grin and before Jim could move to defend himself, the stoker's fist crashed against his cheekbone. Jim staggered back but didn't fall. The impetus of Blacky's rush didn't give Jim any time to get away. Hard, merciless blows crashed into his face and body. Twice Jim was knocked down and each time he sprang to his feet only to be hammered and

torn apart by the enraged giant.

Finally his body could stand no more and he toppled to the ground. He got to his knees but there his last remaining strength left him. Roaring an oath, the stoker grabbed Jim by the shoulder, yanked him to his feet and then smashed another terrible blow into the battered face. Jim's feet left the ground and he lay there like a dead man.

Blacky plunged after his fallen victim. His foot encased in a heavy boot was raised to smash down on the unconscious man's head.

"Stop!" Jean had recovered consciousness just in time to see Jim knocked down for the last time. Blacky's foot hesitated in mid-air, just long enough for Jean to flash to his side and give his unbalanced body a shove. Caught by surprise, Blacky staggered and his foot came down viciously several feet from Jim's head.

Blacky turned toward her.

"Ya woke up, huh. That's good cause I like my wimmen when they got their peepers open." Blacky started his relentless advance toward Jean. Wildly she looked back for escape and cried out in despair as she saw Blacky's two cronies behind her. She made a vain effort to dash around Blacky. His arm shot out and grasped her shoulder.

Ruthlessly the burly stoker pulled her close. Her tiny fists beat a tattoo on his chest and face. Then as she felt herself being smothered in the giant's embrace she slashed her fingernails down his face and felt them bite into his skin.

With a growl of pain Blacky pinned her hands together using only one of his huge paws. His other hand curled in back of her head and grabbed a handful of her soft hair.

"Ya scratch like a cat—let's see if ya kin love like one." His body bent over hers and his head came closer.

Jean was only dimly conscious that her hands had been released.

Blacky turned just in time to see someone charging at him with the speed of an express train. A steel-hard fist crashed into his face and Blacky was spinning backwards—down into the sand. He fell beside the knife he had contemptously thrown aside and in another moment he was on his feet charging at the intruder, the knife swung in short, vicious arcs.

The man who had charged in was as big and powerful as Blacky. The first glistened on his bare arms and revealed the bulging, powerful muscles. It was the drunken stoker.

He calmly awaited Blacky's charge. As the knife plunged toward his chest, the muscular arms shot upward. One hand fastened about Blacky's wrist and the other slid back toward the elbow. Blacky's body started to leave the ground as the newcomer spun on his heel, applied pressure under the elbow and bent the forearm over his shoulder.

Blacky tried to resist the upward swing of his body. The bone snapped like kindling wood and then Blacky's body described a tremendous arc as it hurtled over the newcomer's shoulder.

Like a flash Blacky's conqueror dived to his left and went down on one knee in the sand. He straightened quickly just as the two stokers started to rush him. In his hand was the gun.

The two charging stokers stopped dead in their tracks.

With the gun still covering the cowering stokers, the man let his eyes drop to Jean's still form. He kneeled beside her, placed his free hand on her shoulders and raised her to her feet. Her body shuddered under the pressure of his arm and her eyes shot wide

open.

With a cry of terror she tried to pull away and the man barked, "Stop it you fool."

Jean stopped her struggles. Then she became aware of the altered circumstances and her eyes opened wide as she saw Blacky on the ground, the two stokers standing with their hands in the air, and the gun in the grip of another wild, ruthless looking stoker.

The man seemed to anger at her slow reactions and with a tremendous heave pulled her to her feet.

Blacky was still moaning. His two companions continued to stare at the muzzle of the gun as if they were hypnotized.

Slowly, and drawing Jean with him he backed away from the fire, the gun still covering Blacky's two friends. The fire had started to die, but momentarily flared, revealing the man's face to Jean. She shuddered as she saw the hard, stubble-bearded face, the cold staring eyes and the powerful muscles of his arms.

They had almost backed away from the light of the fire and were about to be swallowed by the darkness when the man tripped. His arm tore away from Jean's wrist as he fell over backwards. Instantly, the two stokers started to rush, but he was back on his knees instantly.

"Back or you'll swallow lead." The rush stopped as quickly as it started and the two stokers backed away rapidly.

For a few minutes there was complete silence except for noise made by Jean's and the stoker's bodies as they crashed through the tangled wilderness. His body was some protection to her from the clawing brushes that ripped at her clothes and flesh.

Involuntarily she stopped dead in her tracks, tried to jerk her hand away from the stoker's grasp and cried, "Where are you taking me? He tightened his grip on her small wrist and barked, "Cut the gab. We've got to get out of here." Once again he started off, so swiftly now that she was being dragged through the brush.

He stopped so suddenly that she crashed into his back.

"This is where we hole up." Even the rough, sudden words failed to bring her out of her lethargy. She forced herself to stare into the darkness endeavoring to locate the spot indicated by his words.

"Come on." With a sweep of his huge arms he drew a clump of bushes aside and Jean was startled to see an opening in the side of the hill. When Jean made no move to enter the cave the stoker pushed her into the mouth of the cave. He stepped in after her and as the brush snapped back into place it was as if they had suddenly been swallowed up by the black night.

He released Jean's wrist and as her eyes became adjusted to the darkness she saw him lean forward while his hand groped for something on the floor of the cavern. Then the suddenness of a bright beam of light almost tore a startled exclamation from her. In another moment she realized that it came from a flashlight in the hands of the stoker.

The beam settled on an oil lantern which Jean unconsciously realized had once hung on the deck of the Lido. In another moment the stoker was on one knee beside the lamp, a match scratched against rock and then the flame from the wick of the lamp flared as the man snapped off the flashlight.

The stoker slowly got to his feet and turned to face Jean. "We park here. Pick out the softest rock and—sit."

Curiosity momentarily overcame her fear and she allowed her eyes to wan-

der away from the stoker and to take in the details of the cavern. It was a rough square, twelve to fifteen feet wide and almost as long. The ceiling of the cave was about fifteen feet over her head. In the far corner of the cave she saw a cut in the rocks that almost resembled a door, but the flickering light from the lamp didn't permit her to see more than a few feet past the opening.

In another corner of the room she saw a pile of canned goods, blankets, and packages of assorted sizes and shapes. She realized immediately that he, too, had salvaged a considerable amount of stuff from the *Lido*.

From the pile he snatched several blankets, spread them on the hard floor and then repeated the process in the opposite corner of the cave. Then, after straightening up from his task, he snapped, "Take your pick."

A new wave of terror spread through Jean as she realized she was alone with a vicious man.

"Now you get some sleep, you'll need it." As the stoker bent over to blow out the lamp Jean caught a momentary flash of the bitter lines etched deep in his face.

With waves of weariness sweeping through her, she cautiously groped to find her blankets and then allowed herself to sink down upon them. For a few moments her mind ran rampant as she recalled the bloody events of the evening. Then with a gasp of horror she remembered Jim as she had last seen him—his face a bleeding pulp and stretched out unconscious on the beach.

"Mister—" a short, ugly laugh brought her words to an abrupt ending.

There was a moment's silence and then a laugh as the stoker answered. "Mister—that's very funny. Just imagine a Park Avenue lady calling me mister. Just call me Ryan—it'll be easier on you. What do you want?"

"What about Jim—Mr. Reynolds. We left him there. They'll kill him! You've got to go back for him!"

Ryan's voice was acid as he repeated, "I've got to go back for him. Now you listen to me." The words were a command. "I intended taking him with us. When I fell I dropped the gun and when those guys started to rush me I pulled a bluff on them. If we'd been any closer to the fire, it wouldn't have worked and I wasn't going to take a chance of trying to find the gun in that jungle grass because they would have been down my throat in another two seconds."

His voice had taken on a softer note and then as if realizing it, he barked, "And, if you think I'm going to get my brains knocked out trying to get him—well, just forget it. He doesn't mean a thing to me except something I don't like."

Jean's pent-up emotions suddenly let go in the form of tears. Gradually the sobbing slowed and then ceased as she sank into a merciful sleep.

CHAPTER V

Jean awakened gradually.

With a little gasp she sat up and saw Ryan propped up against the wall in the far corner of the cave. As he saw her come to a sitting position he got to his feet and struck a match as he bent over the oil lamp. The flame flickered for a moment and then the room became brighter as oil fed into the wick.

"That's Reynolds." Ryan's thumb jerked in the direction of what looked like a pile of blankets. "I went back to look for the gun. They were gone—probably looking for us, so I brought him back. He's in bad shape."

Jean was at Jim's side instantly. His face was a mass of dark bruises and deep gashes where Blacky's blows had parted skin and flesh. His eyes were big lumps in his head and his mouth was nothing but a bloody gash. His breathing was shallow and irregular.

Jean's startled eyes shot toward Ryan, who was standing slightly to the side. "He's—"

"—Hurt bad," Ryan finished.

"His face — his face. Look what they've done to him."

"His face would heal," Ryan answered. "He's hurt inside—in there." He kneeled down and his finger described a circle over Jim's abdomen. "That's what won't heal," he concluded.

Jean's heart sank and a lump came into her throat. "You mean he is—he's—"

"If you mean he's dying, the answer is yes. There's nothing we can do about it. He needs a doctor—and an operation." His words were casual, as if death was the most unimportant thing in the world.

Jean's voice rose several pitches and then cracked as she pleaded, "We've got to do something. We just can't sit here and watch him die. Do something —do something — do something —" Ryan's open hand smacked sharply against her jaw and her hysterical cries stopped abruptly.

"Sorry," Ryan mumbled. "I had to do that. Your going off the beam isn't going to do him any good—or us either. All we can do is try and make it easier for him—understand?"

Jean nodded and buried her face in her hands.

"I'll fix something to eat." Ryan's voice was still gruff. "It will make you feel better." He picked several cans from the pile of salvaged material and cut them open with a small ax that came from the same place.

"It's pineapple," Ryan said. "Eat it—it'll give you a pick-up."

Wordlessly Jean slumped to the floor and like an automaton picked chunks of pineapple from the can and placed them in her mouth. The fruit stuck in her throat and she could swallow it only after a great effort. Her eyes kept straying to the still form under the pile of blankets.

Periodically the injured man would moan and with each agonized sound Jean would wince as if she were feeling the pain. After choking a final piece of fruit down her throat she crossed over to Reynolds, kneeled down and her lips moved in silent prayer.

Ryan was a silent spectator to the drama. In the dim light his eyes roved from the dying man to the girl.

The frown departed and the hands ceased their spasmodic movements. He crossed the floor and kneeled beside the girl.

"Love him—don't you?" His voice was hoarse as if he were actually forcing the words from his throat and lips.

"We were going to be married." Her words were soft and simple.

"You didn't answer my question—or did you?"

Jean's voice was as puzzled as the expression on her face when she asked, "What are you talking about?"

"Never mind." The words were sharp. "There's work to be done—if you've got the stomach for it." Without another word he reached into the pile of salvage and extracted a small case and placed it on the floor. He strode through the cavern opening and returned in a couple of minutes with an armful of small, dead branches.

Jean, in a daze watched him as he flung the contents of the pineapple can out of the cave opening and then poured water into the empty tin. A match scratched on the floor and the pile of

brushwood in the corner flickered and then broke into a blaze as he fanned it with his hand. The small case on the floor was snapped open exposing a half-dozen gleaming surgical instruments. These he plunged into the can of water which he had somehow balanced on the burning brushwood.

Turning in Jean's direction he snapped, "if you've got a white slip, take it off—fast. Then you'll find a brook right outside. Go scour your hands in the sand and get back here as quick as you can."

For a minute or two she disappeared from view and then returned with a white slip that she had removed from underneath her tattered dress. Without a word she handed it to Ryan then left the cave to scour her hands in the sand at the brook while he continued to kneel over the can on the fire.

The bright sunlight and fresh air almost cleared Jean's head as she kneeled at the brook and started to scrub her hands in the gleaming white sand.

When she returned to the cave Ryan greeted her with, "Here, hold this can in place while I scrub my hands—and don't let it fall."

Just as Ryan re-entered, the water in the can started to boil and he relieved her of the job of holding the can with the instruments.

"Get him undressed." Ryan's head jerked toward the unconscious man.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You're—you're going to oper—"

Ryan's reply came fast. "Of course. That's his only chance and it isn't much of a chance at that. Now get his clothes off."

Jean's mind was racing furiously as she started the task of undressing Reynolds. An operation — a stoker using surgeon's instruments—a cavern floor for an operating table—a slip for bandages. Jim Reynold's nude body soon was on the floor in front of her.

She turned from Reynolds just in time to see Ryan remove the instruments from the boiling water and wedge them, blade upright, between some rocks. Next, he held the white slip by one corner while he poured the boiling water over it. He smiled, "Not exactly hospital procedure, but it'll have to do."

For a few moments he continued to hold the slip while he allowed it to cool and then after wringing the water from it he handed it to Jean and said, "Here, this will have to do for a sponge as well as a bandage."

He was about to step toward Reynolds but paused for a moment and said, "This is going to be pretty rugged stuff. But, you're going to have to stand it and do exactly as I tell you. If we slip he won't live through it. If you start to feel faint or sick breathe with your mouth open and get your head down.

"Now, let's go—and pray that he doesn't wake up because I don't have an anaesthetic to give him. He's in shock and a coma so I think we can finish the job without his coming to—I hope."

Ryan went down on his knees and his hands started a swift examination on Reynold's abdominal area. His hands hovered in a spot for several moments and then he probed with fingers that seemed to have suddenly acquired a sense of their own.

The fingers stopped probing and suddenly his eyes lifted to meet the almost hypnotized stare of Jean's. Ryan reached up and took hold of her hand and almost gently pulled her down to his side.

Suddenly the fixed stare left her eyes and Ryan said, "Now, listen. This man has got one chance in a million to live through this. But, he won't even

have that one chance unless you do exactly as I tell you. Do you understand what I'm telling you?"

His eyes searched hers and he gave a sigh of relief as she nodded her head and answered, "I understand. I'm all right now."

"Okay. This is going to be a pretty bloody and messy affair. You've got to keep sponging up the blood so that I can see what I'm doing. He's bleeding now on the inside and we've got to stop it. If we're lucky, it won't take long. If we're not, well—"

"Here we go." In another moment a gleaming knife was in his hand. Quickly the first incision was made. Blood welled to the surface and tore a startled gasp from Jean.

"Wipe!" barked Ryan. Hastily she swabbed the blood away as the scalpel bit deeper into Reynold's abdomen. The unconscious man moaned and his body twisted. Ryan's knife hand paused momentarily until Reynolds was again quiet.

Another cut—blood gushed. Frantically, Jean tried to sponge it up. Ryan threw the knife to the rocky floor and plunged the fingers of both hands into the incision. Under the pressure of his fingers the incision widened and finally formed a gaping wound.

Rapidly Ryan's hands manipulated his pitifully few instruments in the wound. With faultless precision, scalpel and scissors performed their merciful task.

"That's all I can do," Ryan said softly.

Reynolds' face was gray—almost like a death-mask. His breathing was barely discernible. Jean looked at Ryan.

"I'm afraid it is too late." Ryan's voice was soft. Jean made no reply.

"All right." The suddenness of Ryan's voice was a shock to Jean. "Either the bleeding has stopped, or, he's dead. Slowly, Ryan withdrew his hand and motioned for Jean to release the edges of the wound. Her cramped fingers almost refused to part contact with the incision, but, slowly she pried them away.

Ryan was kneeling at Reynolds' head. With thumb and forefinger he lifted the man's eye lid, nodded his head and then reached for the wrist. "He's still alive, but I don't know for how long. He's lost too much blood—more blood than any body can stand to lose."

"No chance?" Those were Jean's first words since the start of the operation.

Ryan broke the silence. "Well, I guess I better have a look. As Ryan started to pull himself up, Jean made an effort to follow suit, but stopped when he said, "You stay here for a while. There's nothing you can do in there right now. Get some rest. You'll need all your strength later." The darkness of the cave enclosed him.

CHAPTER VI

As the day ebbed, the flicker of life that still burned inside of Reynolds seemed to grow weaker. Ryan and Jean had taken turns sitting at his side, bathing the parched lips and sponging the feverish body.

As the night shadows were stealing over the island, Ryan aroused enough to break open a few cans of food. They ate without comment or appetite.

Finally, Ryan crossed over to Reynolds, placed a hand on the burning forehead while fingers of his other hand felt for the ever-weakening pulse. At last he straightened up, shook his head and said, "He can't make it."

He looked at Jean for several moments as if expecting an answer and then when none came, he continued, "I'm going to sit outside for a while.

If you want me, just give a call." In a moment he was through the cave entrance.

For a while after his departure, Jean's thoughts ran rampant. Then the crazy pattern of the last two days seemed to settle and her thoughts grew more coherent.

After a time, the deep shadows thrown by the flickering lantern, the intense quiet of the cave and the ever-nearing presence of death created a longing for the sound of a voice. She stepped to the cave front, but could see only a pitch blackness.

Softly, she called, "Ryan."

"Yes."

"Do you mind if I come out with you for a while?"

"Suit yourself." The words were neither an invitation or a rebuff.

Jean parted the thickets that concealed the cave entrance and then paused as her eyes tried to locate Ryan in the blackness.

"Here." The words came almost from her feet and looking down she saw his black shape a couple of yards away. He was sitting on the ground, his back against a tree. In another moment Jean was sitting near him.

Jean said haltingly, "I'd like to thank you for—for—"

Ryan's short laugh broke into her stumbling words. "For cutting him open? Don't thank me—he'll die. He'll die and rot just like everything else that I've touched."

Jean didn't know how to answer until finally she said, "Of course, you're a doctor."

"I was a doctor."

"You're still a doctor. You tried to save a life, today."

"Did I? I knew it was hopeless before I started." Jean could sense the tenseness in the man.

Again the barrier had been thrown in front of her. "I've been calling you Ryan all the time and it seems a bit odd," she tried.

If it will make things easier for you, just call me Paul."

"Paul—Paul Ryan. That name sort of sounds familiar."

"Yes, I suppose it does. The name has been in—"

His words were cut short as a low but terrible moan came from the cave. Jean was up on her feet in a moment, groping her way to the cave. Ryan hesitated a moment and followed her.

Entering the cave, Ryan grabbed the oil lamp, crossed the rocky floor and bent over Reynolds who was throwing himself from side to side. A quick glance told him the story.

"The shock of his injury and operation has worn off. He'll have pain now—lots of it."

"Isn't there something—anything you can do to help him?" Her voice was pleading.

Ryan shook his head. "There isn't a thing I can do for him. He's still unconscious, which is some consolation."

For a few more moments he stared at the man's face and then continued, "Look, Miss Dennis, there's not much sense in both of us sitting here. Suppose you try to get some sleep. I'll call you if anything happens."

Her eyelids grew heavy and in another few moments sleep came to relieve her.

CHAPTER VII

Slowly, Jean came out of her stupor-like sleep. A few beams of reflected sun rays told her that it was morning.

Ryan was still sitting in the same spot in almost the same position as she had last seen him. She turned to him and said, "It's morning. You've been

sitting here all night. Why didn't you let me take a turn?"

His shoulders lifted in a slight shrug as he replied, "There was nothing you could do to help him. I dozed off from time to time so I feel okay. There's an open can of fruit in the corner. Consider that your breakfast."

Jean took the open tin from the corner and swallowed some of the fruit. It tasted good, freshened her and made her mind clear.

Once more she crossed over to kneel besides the silent Ryan and the unconscious Reynolds. "Did he awaken at any time?"

Ryan shook his head. "No. Once or twice I thought he was going to come out of it, but nothing happened."

"Isn't—isn't there anything more you can do for him? Must you just sit there and watch him die?"

He snapped back. "I'm not a miracle man. There's only one other thing that could help him and that's a transfusion. There's no way to give him that so—" He left the sentence unfinished, scrambled to his feet and started to walk toward the cave entrance.

"Where are you going now?" Jean's voice was a little panicky as she visualized herself being left alone.

Ryan spoke of his shoulder as he reached the mouth of the cave. "I've got to see if I can find some other kind of food. We can't keep living on canned fruit."

Slowly and carefully Ryan worked his way through the jungle-like growth. His only weapon was a small, round rock that he had picked up at the mouth of the cave.

For an hour Ryan picked his way through the underbrush and saw nothing for his pains except a few wild berry bushes and small birds that flashed in front of him. Then, in a tree a few yards ahead, a splash of color caught his eye. A large bird the size of a crow was perched on a branch. Instinctively Ryan drew back his hand and the stone went whistling through the air in the direction of the sitting bird. As the stone left his hand, Ryan muttered a curse as he instantly knew that he had thrown it too high.

But, this time luck was with Ryan. The bird sensed danger and with a wild scream and a rush of wings launched itself into the air—right into the path of the hurtling rock. The bird's scream broke off abruptly and his heavy body plummeted to the ground a few feet away from Ryan.

On the way back to the cave, Ryan spotted several yam-like plants which he decided to take along just in the event that they were edible.

Jean betrayed her excitement as he entered the gloomy interior. "He came to for a few moments!"

Ryan bent over Reynolds and gave him a quick examination. "His pulse is stronger. But," he hastily added as he sensed relief in her attitude, "Don't get optimistic about his chances. He's lost too much blood to have any chance to pull througth."

His abrupt, callous reply was just like a dash of cold water in her face.

"I killed a bird. If you fix it up, we'll have it to eat later." His words were clipped, almost a command.

"I don't have the slightest idea how to go about a job like that," she replied.

Ryan's answer came in that tone that the girl hated to hear. "That's right. I forgot you're from Park Avenue. Even to fill your own stomach you wouldn't dirty your hands." Without another word, he grabbed one of the surgical knives from the case and plunged out of the cave.

She could hear Ryan splashing water from the brook and could pic-

ture the furious anger with which he was working. Finally she cooled and she began wondering about the strange explosive personality of Ryan. She knew that something, somebody in Ryan's life had played him a pretty shabby sort of trick.

"Jean." The voice was faint, almost a murmur.

"Jimmy! Oh! Jimmy! Thank God." Jean's voice was almost a prayer as her hands groped for the hands of Reynolds.

"What happened, Jean? Where am I?" His voice was low but much stronger.

Before Jean could reply, Ryan came back into the cave. Reynolds couldn't see Ryan but heard the noise he made as he entered. "Jean, who is that?"

"It's all right, Jim. That's Ryan." Her voice was reassuring.

"Ryan? Who's Ryan? Where did he come from?"

"You're awake, Reynolds. Quickly Ryan struck a match and the gloom of the cave was partially dissipated by the flickering rays from the oil lamp. Ryan kneeled down beside Reynolds. One hand went to the wrist seeking the pulse and the other to Reynold's forehead. He threw back the blanket and quickly examined the operated area. Once again, Ryan's mood had changed and now he seemed very much the professional man.

Jean's sigh of profound relief was almost audible as Ryan said, "You're going to make the grade, Reynolds. We'll have to call it a miracle."

Reynolds was bewildered. "Who are you?"

Ryan turned to Jean and said, "You better give him the story. I've still got things to do outside." He turned abruptly and left the cave.

"Jean, What's this all about? What happened to me and who is Ryan?" Jim asked.

"Hush, Jim. If you'll be quiet I'll tell you all about it."

Reluctantly, Reynolds nodded his head in agreement.

CHAPTER VIII

The next few days were almost entirely uneventful. Reynolds seemed to gain strength rapidly. He slept most of the time and would awaken only long enough to eat a bit and then would promptly fall off into another long and restful sleep.

Ryan spent very little of his time in the cave. He was always out seeking food or something that would make their quarters more livable. Day by day he grew more surly, and while his constant expeditions were the means of supplying food and other living necessities, his increasing sulliness created a tense situation for Jean.

All of the cooking had to be done in the night in the cave interior as an outside fire would have attracted the attention of the stokers who were still on the island. From time to time, Jean and Ryan caught glimpses of them and once two of them had even passed directly in front of the mouth of the cave. It was a tense moment for the cave occupants, but the dense underbrush successfully concealed the entrance and the men went crashing and stumbling through the thickets beyond the cave.

They knew that Blacky and his gang had either found the gun that Ryan had dropped or located another one on the *Lido* as they occasionally heard the report of a shot.

Another few days passed and Reynolds recovered by leaps and bounds. Whenever Ryan did happen to be in the cave, Reynolds' eyes were constantly studying him. There was a haunting familiarity to Ryan's face,

but the one or two attempts made by Reynolds and Jean to converse with him met with such sharp rebuff that they soon gave it up as a bad job.

One night the three of them were sitting around a small fire eating their evening meal. Everything was silent except for the crackle of the flames and a word or two exchanged between Jim and Jean.

Suddenly Reynolds gasped. Dramatically he pointed a finger at Ryan and exclaimed. "Now I remember. You're Ryan—Dr. Paul Ryan—"

Jean broke in, "We know his name is Paul Ryan and that he's a doctor. What are you getting so excited about?"

Ryan hadn't moved a muscle, but now he said, "Let him finish. You'll find the story very interesting."

Jim next words came in an excited, stammering flood. "Vivian—Vivian Blair. Remember her? Dr. Ryan—the man that killed her."

With a gasp of horror Jean turned. "Ryan—Paul. My God, it can't be true. Tell him it isn't true."

Ryan's shoulders lifted in a shrug but his words came through clenched jaws. "Yes, I'm *the* Dr. Ryan. The same one that was tried and convicted. Would you like to hear all of the gruesome details, or, do you remember the newspaper stories?"

Jean couldn't utter a word. Reynolds stood frozen by the impact of his own discovery; his finger pointing accusingly at Ryan.

Ryan's voice came low and flat. "This is the way it will always end."

For another moment he sat still then arose quickly and crossed to the corner of the cave. "I'll leave now. You wouldn't sleep very well with a murderer. He almost flung himself toward the cave entrance.

Jean freed her vocal chords and called, "Paul—Paul. Wait, Please—" But, it was too late. Ryan charged out into the night.

CHAPTER IX

A torrential, topical rain started to fall soon after daybreak. It beat into the trees and underbrush with such intensity that it aroused Jean from the fitful sleep that she had fallen into after Ryan's departure. The cave felt damp and chill. Jean's tortured nerves would not permit the return of sleep and she started to pace the cave quietly. Ryan's laugh was still ringing in her ears and she couldn't shut it out.

At last her restless pacing aroused Jim and after a dismal exchange of good mornings, the two of them set about putting together some kind of a breakfast.

Reynolds started to launch into a recital of the Vivian Blaire murder and the details that had shocked the city and rocked their own society set. Vivian Blaire had travelled in their crowd and the horrible circumstances of her death had never been forgotten.

"Please, Jim. I'd rather not talk about that. It was too horrible and I just can't bring myself to believe that the Paul Ryan we know could have done anything like that."

"All right. I'm grateful for what he did for us, but that doesn't alter the circumstances of Vivian's murder. Now, don't start getting silly ideas about his heroics. He was just a nobody that studied medicine and developed into a good doctor. But, don't forget that his father had a criminal record and he just couldn't get far enough away from his environment to miss dropping back into it."

"That's enough," Jean snapped. "I told you that I didn't want to talk about it. If I want to cherish a few illusions,

it's none of your business."

Jean walked to the mouth of the cave and through the tangle of brush stared out into the rain that was still beating down. Reynold's puzzled eyes followed her path as he debated with himself the wisdom of trying to impress her that they were far better off with Ryan gone. But, finally with a shrug of his shoulders, he decided to drop the matter and stretched himself out on his blanket.

For sometime the cave was entirely quiet except for the sound of the downpour which seemed to increase in intensity as the minutes passed. Then Reynold was startled from a half doze when Jean called out, "Jim. Here he comes."

Ryan was drenched to the skin, his matted hair plastered down by the water. The water streamed down his face, ran off his chin to his already saturated chest. He stared directly at Jean, his eyes weary clouded.

Jean spoke: "We're glad you've come back, Paul. Come in." Her words were simple and sincere.

Ryan laughed, but only with his mouth. "What's the matter? Isn't he as good a servant as I am? Couldn't he find—"A loud report broke into his words and then something whistled past their ears and smashed against the rocks.

Ryan reacted immediately as Jean and Reynolds stood rooted to the spots in which they stood. "Inside. Quick." He gave them both a violent shove as they still stood transfixed. Both sprawled to the floor and Ryan followed with a headlong dive. Two more shots rang out in rapid succession and the slugs again smashed against the wall over their heads.

The crash to the floor brought Reynolds and Jean out of their stunned stupor and all three of them scrambled along the floor and down into the angled opening of the cave. Only their heavy breathing punctuated the silence.

"Paul—Jim. Are you—" Jean's frightened voice broke off suddenly.

Reynolds' voice, frightened, replied, "I'm okay."

"Paul! How about you?" Jean's voice was tight.

In answer to her question, Ryan started to get to his feet. He moved slowly, as if each motion was made with a great effort. At last he was on his feet but he leaned back against the rock wall as if he had not enough strength to support himself.

Jean darted across the cave. "Paul. You're hit!" Jean was at his side and her arm went around his waist.

Ryan shook his head. "I wasn't hit —hurt myself when I dived to the floor. It's my shoulder—broken or dislocated." He moved suddenly as if ashamed of his weakness and took several steps toward the cave entrance.

For the first time since the shooting, Reynolds spoke. "We'd better think of something—quick. They'll be in here after us in a few minutes!"

Ryan's reply was slow and heavy. "No. They won't come in after us. They don't know that we don't have a gun. All they have to do is sit out there and wait. They know they've got us.

The fingers of Ryan's right hand had been busy exploring the injured left shoulder as he had been speaking. "Well, it's only dislocated. That's some consolation," he said.

Ryan's fingers continued to probe and test, gently, with the assurance and skill of a professional man. That he had been a top-notch doctor Jean could easily see. He *was* good.

"This can be set if the two of you will help me out—if you don't mind." Even now there was that tinge of sar-

casm and bitterness in his voice.

Jean and Reynolds crossed the cave and stood waiting for his instructions. "First, get this shirt off me." Ryan smothered several gasps of pain as they maneuvered the wet, clinging shirt from his body.

"Reynolds, put your hand right here." He indicated a spot just below the joint. "Jean, place both hands right on top of the shoulder. All set? When I say PUSH, I want you, Reynolds, to push forward and up. Jean, you'll push down just as hard as you can."

When he was seated, Reynolds and Jean assumed their positions and and tensed for the word. "Push!"

It was all over in a second. There was a subdued snap as the bone slid back into the socket and a low groan from Ryan. His head slumped and he would have pitched off the rock if their hands hadn't still been on his body.

But his head came up and his eyes reflected relief from the pain. "Sorry. I blacked out for a moment. I'm all right now.

In another few moments a sling had been placed in position and Jean had gently guided the arm into its resting place. Ryan mumbled a thanks and started pacing the floor.

"Well, what are we going to do?" Reynolds asked belligerently.

Ryan stopped abruptly and snapped, "Suppose you try thinking for yourself for a change. You—" He broke off and resumed his endless pacing.

After a few moments, Reynolds again broke the silence. "Look here. Those fellows are nothing but scum and all they want is enough money to keep themselves saturated in liquor. Let's bargain with them."

"Bargain with them!" The words fairly exploded from Ryan's mouth. "All the money in the world won't do them any good here. There's only one thing that they'd bargain for and it isn't your money."

"What do you mean, Paul." Jean's voice was quiet and calm.

Ryan's voice had lost its edge as he turned to face Jean. "Now, look. I'm going to speak very bluntly because we haven't got time to be tactful. To be brutally frank they want you—with or without bargaining."

"Oh, Paul! Aren't you—"

"Judging them too harshly?" Ryan finished for her and then laughed sarcastically. "You seem to forget, Miss Park Avenue, that up until very recently, those men were my esteemed associates. I know exactly what they think and what they want. Don't cherish any illusions about our morals."

Jean didn't reply. Reynolds had slumped back into a corner of the cave and his limp, dejected body indicated that he realized the hopelessness of their position and was willing to accept the inevitable.

"I'm going out there." Ryan's words were abrupt.

"You're not going to leave this cave." Jean's voice was blazing. "They'll kill you before you've gone two steps and—"

Ryan broke in, "So far, I've been doing the directing around here and I'll continue until someone better comes along. I'm going out."

Jean burst out. "You fool. Go and get yourself killed." Her voice choked up on the last few words and she whirled around furiously and stalked to the opposite end of the cave.

Ryan's eyes were curious as they followed her and he seemed on the point of speaking, but then shrugged and walked toward the cave opening. He walked out of the cave proper into the short tunnel, reached the opening covered by the high brush and reached out to part the brush growth.

"Paul! Wait!"

Ryan gave no sign that he had heard her and plunged through the brush. Two gun shots rang out immediately and the slugs smacked against the outer rocks. Instantly Ryan came dashing and sprawling through the brush back into the safety of the cave. Another shot sounded and this one came tearing through the brush and flattened out against the back wall.

"Well, that's—" He stopped suddenly. "Wait! What's that?" His forehead drew together in a puzzled frown.

They heard a faint rumble which grew louder by the moment and then increased to the intensity of a roar. The very walls of the cave seemed to be vibrating.

Then hell b r o k e loose. Huge boulders came hurtling down, crashed to the ground and then tore they way through the dense growth. The grinding and smashing of the rocks was deafening. The rocky floor trembled underneath their feet as the thunder of giant rocks and boulders continued.

For a few moments Jean stood spellbound and then with a low cry of fright ran to Ryan and buried her head on his shoulder. She was shaking with fright. Unconsciously his arm stole around her waist while he stood there with clenched jaw and tensed body.

Then silence—a silence almost as deafening as the tumult that had just subsided. Slowly Jean lifted her head.

"Wh—What happened?"

"It was a rock slide—a big one. The vibrations of those shots must have set it off."

"Paul! It's so dark in here. I can hardly see you. What's the matter?"

"That slide sealed the cave."

"Oh, my God." It was a prayer the way Jean said it.

A beam of light shot across the cave as Reynolds used the flash to locate the oil lamp. He didn't say a word until he shut off the flashlight and its beam was replaced by the weaker, flickering light of the oil lamp. Then: "Well, Dr. Ryan, you and your heroics have made this a lovely ending." His voice was furious.

At the sound of his voice, Jean wheeled away from Paul to face Reynolds. "At least, Paul tried to do something. All you've done since we've been here is criticize. Shut up." Jean's voice reached an hysterical pitch.

Reynolds flinched with surprise at the venom in her words and then shot back, "Sure, Ryan doesn't care where he dies—here, or in jail in the States. He's—"

Ryan's voice cut in. "You're not going to die Reynolds, so don't get yourself worked up. There's a way out of here."

"A way out! Paul, what do you mean?" Ryan's words had cut through her hysteria and had acted like a dash of cold water.

"That slit opening in back of the cave leads out of here. There's always a draught of air blowing through it so it must open out someplace—probably on a higher level. Grab everything that you can carry and let's go!"

Reynolds was strangely quiet.

CHAPTER X

As they passed through the opening, they started an immediate ascent. The rise was steep and the going over the sharply inclined, rocky floor made it tough going. At times the passage narrowed so that they had to squeeze through. At other times they had to walk almost doubled up as the floor and the rock ceiling would seem to almost converge.

In a few minutes they were all

breathing heavily from the exertion. Ryan was handicapped by his injured shoulder and Reynolds had weakened rapidly because he had not fully recovered from his operation.

After a few more minutes Ryan called a halt in a part of the tunnel that had suddenly widened out.

"You'd better turn off that flash while we're resting, Jean. There's no telling how long we'll be in getting out of here and we'd be sunk if the battery gave out." Ryan sucked air into his heaving lungs. The light went out abruptly and in the resulting darkness they couldn't see even the vaguest outlines of each other's bodies.

In a few minutes Ryan called, "Let's go," and once more the passage was illuminated as Jean turned on the flash.

They worked their way in silence. Twice more they stopped for brief rests and as they resumed after the last one, Ryan said, "It shouldn't be much further. The top of this mountain must be pretty close at the rate we've been climbing. Then we'll find the exit, or—" He didn't finish the sentence. He didn't have to.

Jean merely nodded her head in agreement. Reynolds didn't say a word.

It was Ryan who was the first to spot their goal. He stopped so suddenly that Jean following directly behind almost knocked him over.

"Look! There it is!" Even Ryan's voice was excited as he shouted, "Daylight!"

Straight ahead and on a slightly higher level daylight was streaming in through a large opening in the rocks. For a few moments the three, weary and battered, stood and stared at the welcome rays of light filtering into the dark tunnel.

"Thank God," Jean murmured.

Ryan was more practical. "Come on. Let's get out of here."

With the end of the journey so close, the three unconsciously quickened their steps and in a few more minutes they stood at the mouth of the tunnel. Ryan was the first one out and the other two heard his voice registering sheer amazement say, "I'll be damned."

Jean and Reynolds pushed their ways past him and the sight that met their eyes accounted for the sheer disbelief in Ryan's voice. They were standing at the very top of the hill. Looking down they saw a valley under full cultivation and populated. Down below, people were moving around in green fields. The entire valley two to three miles in length and perhaps a mile wide, seemed to be one vast farm.

Jean's voice was soft as she said, "It seems almost impossible."

Reynolds broke his long silence by saying, "Only Fifth Avenue could look better to me."

Ryan was silent. His eyes were searching the valley from end to end.

Reynolds was impatient. "Come on," he said. "Let's go down and announce ourselves. I see cows and that means fresh meat and a real meal."

Jean grabbed Ryans arm. "Paul, let's hurry. In all my life I've never been so glad to see people as I am those." Her finger pointed at the busy field workers.

A slow, tired smile momentarily lit Ryan's face. "Okay. Let's go."

Glancing down again, Ryan saw a faint path leading down through the trees and heavy underbrush. "Evidently," he said, "This tunnel is no secret to those people. There's a path leading down and from the looks of it, they use it once in a while."

Down they started, but trouble popped immediately. They hadn't gone more than ten steps when there was a

violent thrashing of the underbrush on both sides of the trail and in a moment they were entirely surrounded by brown skinned men armed with gleaming, deadly knives.

The brown skinned men said nothing, but rapidly tightened the circle and in a matter of seconds the three were facing a solid circle of knives.

Ryan's face broke into a tight smile. "Take it easy," he cautioned through set lips. "We're trapped and there isn't a damn thing we can do.

Ryan noticed that their captors were studying them intently. Their faces showed no hostility; just determination and a passive curiosity. Paul started to speak, but immediately one of the brown men stepped forward and pointed down the trail with his finger.

"They want us to go down," Ryan said. "I guess we better get moving before they start to get ambitious with those knives."

When they were about halfway down the incline the brown men started to speak among themselves in a soft, musical dialect. Ryan started with surprise as they talked and then be began to study them even more closely.

Soon, the steep incline became a gentle, rolling slope and the group started to pass small, thriving farms. The people in the fields turned casual glances their way and just as casually turned away and resumed working at their tasks. Everyone seemed busy. Everyone seemed happy.

Finally the floor of the valley was reached and in another few minutes they arrived at what seemed to be a central group of buildings. They were all large and roughly made with only one seeming a bit larger than the others.

Immediately the three prisoners were herded into a smaller building and left to their own devices. Strangely enough, the door of the rough building was not closed but a guard was left in front of the door in plain sight of the prisoners.

A heavy silence held sway in the semi-dark room. Ryan paced restlessly back and forth while Reynolds sat slumped in a rough chair in the corner of the large room.

"For God's sake, Ryan, stop it! You're driving me crazy."

Ryan stopped, turned and stared at Reynolds. Then he shrugged his shoulders and walked across the room to another chair. Reynolds' chin sunk to his chest and his hands began a nervous twitching.

Jean was calm. "What do you think is going to happen to us, Paul?" Fear seemed to have left her and she seemed prepared to accept anything that fate was going to dish out.

Ryan's good shoulder lifted in another shrug. "I don't have any idea. We seem to have stumbled into a sort of little, lost world and it looks like we're not exactly welcome. But, if its any consolation to you, those boys who jumped us don't seem to be particularly vicious. In fact, they didn't pay the slightest bit of attention to us after the first few minutes."

Jean replied, "Whatever is going to happen will happen, and that's all there is to it."

Ryan nodded. "Under the circumstances that's a wise philosophy. Better see if you can instill some of it into that boy friend of yours."

Reynolds was a pathetic sight. Jean crossed the room, put her arm around Reynolds' shoulders and started to talk softly to him. Ryan shoved his chair back and resumed pacing the room. From time to time he glanced out the door, but the guard hadn't moved from his original position. In fact, he was sitting so quietly that Ryan was almost

sure he was asleep.

Jean's low conversation with Reynolds seemed to have bucked him up because he arose from the chair, walked over to Ryan and said, "I'm sorry, Ryan. Guess I just hit bottom for a while. I'll be all right now." Those were the first humble words Ryan had ever heard from Reynolds and it was quite a shock.

Ryan smiled. "Forget it. It's all right as long as you can climb off the bottom.

Reynolds now seemed to take a new interest in life and continued the conversation. "What do you make of all this, Ryan? Who do you think these people are?"

"There's nothing to make of it—yet. As for who they are, my guess is that they are Hawaiian origin. At least, that's an Hawaiian dialect that they speak."

Jean interrupted and exclaimed. "Hawaiian? Did you understand what they were talking about?"

"Certainly. That's why I told you that they didn't seem to pay too much attention to us."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of two men. They didn't say a word, but there was no mistaking what they wanted when one of them gestured with his arm.

"Come on," Ryan said, "They want us to follow them. And, I've got a hunch that we're going to find out just what we're up against."

Jean smiled and held up her hand to show that she had her fingers crossed. Reynolds tried to show that he was okay by making a thumbs-up motion. A really human smile crossed Ryan's face. Then, silently they turned and followed the men out of the house.

The journey was short. They crossed the crude street to the larger building and were led directly into a large room. Three men were present and all stared at the prisoners as they came forward. For several long moments the silent trio of men studied the captives intently.

The three men were seated at a crude table. The man in the center was old, very old. Deep lines of age etched his face like an engraving. His hair was a stone grey matching the color of his long beard. It was a striking contrast against the mahogany texture of his skin. His hands that rested so quietly on the table provided additional evidence of his age. They were seamed and twisted like a great oak. Only his great brown eyes seemed young. They were like glowing sparks of coal.

Each of the two men that flanked him were young, intelligent and powerful looking.

The old man was the first to speak. His voice was strong with the mellow timber of fine music. His words were direct. The three captives started with surprise as the old man said in faultless English, "I am Lenai, ruler of this island. These are my sons, Sam and John. Yes," the old man interrupted his words with a little smile as if he anticipated their surprise, "Yes, they are good American names."

Reynolds and Jean gave audible sighs of relief at the sound of the familiar language and the gentle attitude of Lenai. Ryan's features remained almost blank as he studied the old ruler.

Almost immediately Reynolds became conversational, "My name is Reynolds. The young lady is Jean Dennis and this is Paul Ryan. Our yacht—"

"Yes," Lenai broke in, "We know your yacht was wrecked. We know you have been on this island for many weeks. We know many things about you as we have been watching you constantly. We knew you were living in the cave and when the rock slide oc-

curred, we were sure you would find your way out through the tunnel. That is why our reception committee was there when you came out."

This time Jean broke into the conversation, and her voice registered the anger that showed on her face. "If you knew we were here all the time, why didn't you do something to help us? Why didn't—"

Jean broke off abruptly as one of the ruler's sons jumped to his feet, his face contorted with anger. The old man gestured gently with his hand and after a moment the lad sat down, his eyes still burning with resentment.

"Just a moment," Lenai said. "Permit me to explain a few things about our little island and then you perhaps will understand your position."

For the first time Ryan broke his silence. "Well, here comes the catch."

"What did you say, Mr. Ryan?" Lenai asked.

"The words I used don't make much difference. I actually meant that now we'll find out what's going to happen to us."

"You are quite right," Lenai replied. "But, before we discuss that, it is only right that I give you a brief history of our island. Only with that will you be able to understand our decision regarding you.

"Many years ago, a small group of us migrated here. The blight of civilization had spread over our beloved islands. The blights of disease and moral decay spread by the white peoples soon made human wreckage of our people who had once been a royal race."

The old man's eyes were staring into the distance as if the years had rolled back and once more he was seeing the events of long ago. Then he continued speaking and his voice had grown even softer. "So, a comparative few of us came here to live out our days in peace and in the traditions of our once noble people. Our community, free of the contaminating influence of the whites flowered and flourished. Today we are living in a bountiful plenty where we know little but happiness.

"Is it any wonder then that we are most anxious to protect what we have nourished these many years? You must certainly understand why the secret of this island is guarded with our very lives. Yes, you must understand that if this little spot of paradise became known that all too soon it would feel the blights and then our last refuge would be gone."

"That's all very interesting, but just what do you intend to do with us?" All of the arrogance had gone from Reynolds. His voice was courteous but held no note of fear.

"What will happen to you will be largely of your own making," Lenai replied. "You will be permitted to live here in peace providing you abide by our few and simple laws. You will never be allowed to leave even if you could find the means to do so, for then the secret of our valley would be a secret no longer.

"During the past years just a few have found their way here. They were all products of shipwrecks just like yourselves. Unfortunately, they demonstrated that they could not be desirable members of our community and so we had to exact the extreme penalty. Several of them tried to leave. Naturally—" The old man finished his sentence with a wave of his hand and there was no doubt as to what he meant.

Ryan laughed. "Frankly, sir, I can't think of anything I'd rather do than stay right here. You see, there's no place for me to go even if I did leave here."

Reynolds asked quietly, "You mean

that we'll never be allowed to leave; never be permitted to send out word that we're alive?"

"That is exactly what I mean," Lenai replied. "There is no alternative."

Jean swallowed a lump that had suddenly arisen in her throat and bravely said, "Well, there could be a lot worse things. In fact, I'm sure that the climate is going to agree with me."

Lenai answered her smile with a broader one and said, "Your receptive attitudes will be of great help to you. You could be perfectly miserable if you tried to fight what is inevitable.

"Now, I must tell you of one other very important rule of our community. The others you will learn shortly." The old man paused and studied intently the faces of the three who stood before him. Then he continued. "Here, every man must have a mate. This is purely a moral precaution.

"I assume that one of these men is your husband, or—"

Reynolds interrupted, "Miss Dennis and I were to be married when we returned from the trip. Now, we can even have an island honeymoon." Reynolds seemed like an entirely different person than the snobbish, quarrelsome individual of a few days ago.

The old man seemed surprised at Reynolds' announcement and regarded Jean with wild, searching eyes. Then he looked questionably at Ryan and shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"I suppose," said Ryan, "that this puts me exactly in the middle of the soup pot."

Jean's anxious eyes traveled to Lenai, then to Ryan and finally back to the old man. Several times she seemed on the point of speaking while Lenai continued to study Ryan intently.

Lenai broke the silence and his youthful eyes were twinkling. "Never have we had a mixed marriage as never before has there been reason for one. Yet, our laws do not forbid it." The old Ruler paused for a few moments and then continued as if he were trying to justify his own decision, "I am sure that Mr. Ryan would find some of our maidens most attractive. And, I feel that a strain of white blood running through our people would have certain advantages."

The old man finished and then looked directly at Ryan. Ryan's face had set in hard lines and when he did speak, Jean recognized bitterness. "And, if I refuse?"

Lenai's two sons jumped to their feet and directed a torrent of words in native dialect at their father. Their eyes flashed with fury as they gestured toward Ryan. It was plain that Ryan's apparent refusal had angered and humiliated them.

Jean said nothing, but her eyes never left Ryan's face. Reynolds crossed to Ryan's side, placed a hand on his shoulder and said, "For god's sake, Ryan, be sensible. You'll—"

Ryan knocked the hand from his shoulder and his words were like a lash. "Mind your own damn business!"

Reynolds retreated under the impact of the words and then Lenai who had quieted his two sons and was staring coldly at Ryan said, "Does your alleged white superiority rebel at the thought, Mr. Ryan?" The kindness had gone out of Lenai's voice as he continued. "You have no alternative. If you hold your life so cheaply then there's nothing that I would do for you.

"However, I shall not accept this as your final answer. You will have seven days to adjust yourself to our laws and ways of life, and then—" The old man's unfinished sentence and the eloquent shrug of his shoulders left no doubt as to what he meant.

Ryan's gaze fastened itself on the wall of the room and his lips set in a narrow straight line. Jean shivered as she watched his face and saw the hate and contempt flame into his eyes. The picture of Ryan the stoker floated in front of her.

"I suggest that you go among my people and learn their ways. You will be welcomed by them and you will learn to love them. Perhaps, even Mr. Ryan will overcome his prejudices when he sees the happiness and contentment that exists within our community."

If Lenai expected a reply from Ryan he was disappointed because Ryan's eyes merely looked through Lenai and then he swung on his heel and walked through the door. Lenai merely shook his head and with a soft word quieted his two sons whom had again sprung to their feet in anger at Ryan's direct rebuff.

"You may go now," Lenai said and got to his feet indicating that the interview was at an end. Quietly Jean and Reynolds made their exit to the little street of the little, lost world.

CHAPTER XI

Hours passed and Ryan still had not returned. Jean and Jim had gone to the house in which they had originally been confined, thinking that Ryan would be there waiting for them. They were not worried when they found he wasn't there, but as the hours flew by Jean started to grow frantic.

Finally she started a restless pacing and occasionally walked out the door to the little street to see if there were any sign of him. At last Reynolds said, "Look here, Jean. There can't be anything to worry about. There's no place he could go other than up in the hills. These people know he's gone and they don't seem the least concerned about it. Anyway Ryan can take care of himself."

Jean stopped her pacing for a moment, "I can't help worrying about him, Jim. There's something about Paul that's got me all mixed up inside.

"He's so big, so fine at times and so bitter and cruel at other times. At times he's consumed with hate. But, all along, I've had the feeling that for the most part it's a hate and contempt of himself. He's like a little boy that's been punished for something that isn't his fault."

"Oh, I know he's all right out there somewhere, but, it's what going on inside of him that I'm worried about. He feels that he has been pushed to the limit and he'll let them kill him rather than do what Lenai told him he must do." Jean finished her passionate outburst of words and stood still, twisting her hands in front of her.

For a moment Reynolds stared at her thoughtfully and then he shook his head as if he were trying to discard an idea that he didn't like. His finger traced unseen patterns on the table. At last he looked up and said, "He can't be very far away. Why don't you go out and take a look for him. Somehow, I think he might listen to you."

A peculiar expression fitted across Jean's face and without hesitation, she replied, "That's what I'm going to do." Without another word she turned and walked through the door and out to the street where the long shadows gave evidence of the coming of the tropic night.

From across the narrow street, a man hurried toward Jean. As he drew closer Jean saw that it was one of Lenai's sons. He stopped in front of her, his handsome, brown face illuminated by a friendly smile.

"You are looking for something,

Miss Dennis? Perhaps, Mr. Ryan?" His eyes were as friendly as his smile.

It was the first time that Jean had heard him talk in English and she was visibly surprised.

"Why—why, yes," Jean replied. "I —do you know where he is?"

"Of course. See," he pointed with his finger, "that last house low in the hills?" After Jean's nod, he continued, "Beyond that farm you will find a small grove of trees. A small stream runs through it. There you will find your friend."

"You followed him there?" asked Jean.

"Yes. But, only to see that he came to no harm. Mr. Ryan seems to be impetuous."

Relieved that Ryan was apparently all right, Jean found herself wondering at the faultless English used by the young native. She scanned his face with interest.

He seemed to read her thoughts easily. "Yes, I was also educated in the United States. Your country is wonderful. Your cities are breath-taking. But, this is my life."

Jean thanked him for the information and then started off in the direction that he had indicated. Jean walked slowly while she was wondering how she was going to approach Ryan, wondering what she could possibly say to him that would help him to think more logically, accept what their present surroundings offered.

She sighted the small grove of trees and turned off in that direction.

While still some distance away from the small stream that wound through the grove, she saw Ryan sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, his back towards her. Ryan was sitting motionless except that his powerful hands were savagely snapping small twigs which he would then roll between his hands as if he were trying to grind the rough bark into powder.

That he heard was evidenced by the fact that he suddenly stopped snapping the twigs and sat stiffly motionless. He didn't turn his head.

Jean waited until she was a few yards away and then very softly said, "Paul."

"Yes." The fire raging within him seemed to have consumed all the vital energy of the man. Still he didn't turn his head.

Jean walked the remaining distance and sat down directly by his side.

"Well?" He tried to make his voice harsh, but the spark of fire was gone from him. Jean's eyes filled with tears as she realized the man had hit the bottom and was tasting bitter dregs.

Jean placed her small hand over Ryan's big, hard fist. It was clenched so tight that the nails must have been biting into flesh. "Paul. Look at me." Her words were a soft command.

Reluctantly Ryan turned his head. The fire in his eyes had gone, leaving them a dull, cloudy gray. "All right. What do you want?"

"What are you fighting, Paul? And when Ryan didn't answer, Jean went on, "Loosen up, Paul. It will help you if you'll get it off your mind and share your troubles.

Ryan's clenched fist opened slowly and then gave a great, tired sigh. His great body sagged.

"What am I fighting?" He gave a short laugh. "Nothing, I guess. There's nothing left to fight."

His voice broke off, but resumed after a moment of silence. "I was just being haunted by memories of what used to be and the things that could have been. The brilliant young doctor —a sordid murder—a common escape —years looking for the worst things and finding them. And, now, stuck on this island with the wonderful objective

of spawning eight or ten half-breeds. A wonderful life to look back upon and more wonderful future to look forward to."

This was the moment that Jean had been waiting for. This was the moment that she could ask the question that had been gnawing within her ever since that eventful night in the cave.

"Paul. Why did you kill Vivian Blaire?" The question was so direct that he reacted as if someone had slapped his face.

His fists clenched again; his face set in hard lines and the eyes narrowed and became steely. The man fairly bristled.

"That's what I thought. For a while you had me fooled, but now I see you're just like all the rest. Your sordid curiosity can't rest until you get every last gruesome detail—until you've picked every last bone clean."

"Paul, I—"

"Well, here's every damned bit of the story." The man was almost shouting. "Here's every scrap and morsel of it and I hope it sticks in your throat.

"Vivian Blaire killed my kid brother. Oh, she didn't kill him wth a gun or a knife. She tortured his soul until he committed suicide. They couldn't blame her—they didn't even know—but she killed him just as surely as if she had sent a bullet tearing through his body or if she had plunged a knife into him and twisted it while he was screaming in agony." His hands made a forward and twisting motion so realistic to his words that Jean shuddered visibly.

"He was a swell kid. I put him through medical school—he was good when he came out—started building a fine practice. Then he fell in love with a little Irish girl. They got married—had a baby."

Ryan stopped. He gulped trying to swallow the lump in his throat. "Then he met the Blaire girl. She was beautiful—sexy—a chippy that had crashed the Park Avenue crowd.

"Well, she milked him of every cent that he had put away and then he came to his senses. But, she wouldn't let him alone—kept putting the screws on him for money and when he couldn't come across she spilled the beans to his wife.

"Jerry—his wife—she was young—romantic and terribly in love. She couldn't take it—turned on the gas one night and both she and the baby went to sleep—forever.

"My kid brother blew his brains out the next day."

"I went to see that rotten thing. Called her everything I could think of. Then I hit her—hard. I didn't mean to kill her. She just fell—hit her head against an andiron, and—

"They charged me with murder. I offered no defense—pleaded guilty. The judge thought he sensed something behind my silence and gave me the benefit of the doubt by sentencing me to life, wanted the electric chair.

"I couldn't stand the thought of years behind bars—made a break on the trip to the penetentiary hoping they'd put a bullet through me. Somehow—I don't remember—I got away."

Ryan's great shoulders dropped, his head went down and he whispered like he was voicing a prayer. "I didn't mean it—but she's dead and I'm glad."

In the dusk of the sudden tropical twilight through tear-dimmed eyes, Jean looked at the man who had just bared his soul. Gently she touched his arm and he reacted like a wounded panther.

Ryan bounded to his feet, his body quivering and his face contorted. "Now, damn you, you've heard it all. Tell Reynolds—" his voice caught in his throat and he turned and plunged his

way down the path.

Jean waited a few minutes, her head between her hands. Then she got up and slowly followed Ryan.

CHAPTER XII

Although the following days were uneventful, they passed quickly for Jean and Reynolds. The natives were courteous and cheerful. Most of them talked enough English so that they could answer the many questions they were asked. Jean took an immense liking to the industrious people, and Reynolds rapidly regained his health and strength in the tropical paradise.

Ryan kept entirely to himself. He made no effort at conversation. He would wander off and be gone for hours. He took absolutely no interest in what was going on around him. Many times Jean tried to entice him into conversation, but he would just look at her and without uttering a word he would turn his back and walk away.

Without feeling that she was betraying a confidence, Jean told Reynolds the entire story told to her by Ryan. Reynolds' eyes grew wet as she was relating the story and when it was ended he simply said, "I wish there were some way that I could let him know what a heel I've been."

Then came the day that they were summoned to Lenai's presence. Reynolds and Jean knew what the summons was for but they didn't discuss it. Ryan apparently didn't care as he shuffled along in their wake like a robot.

Lenai was sitting at his crude table with a son on either side. His smile was warm and friendly as he greeted Jean and Reynolds, but it was replaced by a worried frown as he stared at Ryan who stood there with glassy eyes fixed on the wall Lenai's head shook from side to side as if he just didn't know what to do or say to Ryan.

Finally he faced Jean and Reynolds and started talking, "You know—." His words broke off as loud voices were heard from the outside. A faint scuffling took place in the outer room and then three men were pushed into the room, their hands tied behind them. All three of them showed signs of a fight that had taken place. Their faces were torn and bleeding. The natives crowding close behind them showed similar scars of the battle.

Jean and Reynolds both gasped as they recognized Blacky and the two other stokers from the Lido. Involuntarily, Jean shrank back until she was between Ryan and Reynolds. Ryan just stared at the stokers as if he had never seen them before. No expression crossed his face.

Blacky's pig eyes glittered with hate as he glared at Lenai first and then as he recognized Jean and the two men, he spit on the floor to show his contempt.

One of the brown men explained to Lenai that they had spotted the three stokers on top of one of the bluffs and had taken them prisoners as they started down the steep slope to the village. He added quite proudly that there had been quite a fight and jubilantly held out the gun that had been taken from the prisoners. Lenai smiled as the man was talking about the fight.

Lenai studied the three captives and then said, "Untie them." The one who had related the story of the capture started to protest but Lenai repeated his command and then the ropes were promptly removed.

Lenai started to speak, "You men—." That was as far as he got. The native with the captured gun was still holding it loosely in his hand. Blacky's foot

lashed out, caught the man squarely on the wrist and the gun went spinning into the air.

Before anyone could move, Blacky had the gun and was pointing it squarely at Lenai. He backed against the far wall so he could cover everyone in the room. A vicious smile split his face. The room was electric with tension. Not a sound was made.

"You—" Blacky waved his gun at Lenai. "You get over against that wall." Slowly, and without a sign of fear Lenai arose from his chair and backed against the wall.

Once more Blacky's mean eyes swept the room and came to rest on Jean. "You git over there with him."

Blacky barked his command again and when Jean failed to move he waved his free hand at the other two stokers and said, "Grab her."

It seemed as if Blacky's voice brought Ryan out of his trance. As the two men started to move toward Jean he exploded into action. With a hoarse cry he lunged across the room toward Blacky. The gun roared once —twice and then Ryan had his hands on the brute.

The gun went flying through the air as Ryan snapped Blacky's wrist back. Then like a panther he slid in back of his man, one brawny arm circling the neck. His knee went into the small of Blacky's back while his other hand was used as a lever to force the head back.

The rest of the room had erupted the moment Ryan made his move. The other two stokers went down under an avalanche of brown bodies as Ryan was working on Blacky. The big stoker fought desperately, but inch by inch he was being bent backwards. He screamed in terror, made one final and mighty effort and then suddenly went limp as his backbone snapped.

Ryan released his grip, watched the huge body slump to the floor and then he suddenly collapsed. The bullet that had torn through his shoulder had finally taken its toll.

CHAPTER XIII

For days Ryan ranged between life and death. An infection had set in and his temperature soared to an alarming degree. The natives did everything that they could, but it was Jean's constant nursing and Ryan's natural health that finally turned the tide of the battle. Night after night Jean had sat by the side of the delirious Ryan, soothing him and applying cold cloths to the burning head.

Then came the morning that Ryan opened his eyes, took in his surroundings and lay there quietly as recollection came to him. Jean was sitting dozing in a chair.

"Good morning."

Jean almost fell out of the chair at the sound of his voice and in another moment she was sitting on the edge of his rough bed.

"Oh, Paul. Thank God." She held his hand and said his name over and over again. Tears of thankfulness flooded her eyes and as Ryan just laid and watched her, a puzzled expression on his face. In another few moments he had dropped off into a natural and healthy sleep.

The next few days he slept almost constantly. He would awaken only long enough to eat a little, exchange a few words with Jean or Reynolds and then he would be off again in another long sleep.

Finally he was strong enough to sit up and that was the day Lenai came to see him.

The old man talked to him gently, like he would have talked to his own sons and thanked him for the action

that had saved his life and probably the lives of several others.

"Is there anything that I can do in return for your saving my aged but still somewhat useful life?' Lenai's smile loaned dignity to the words.

Ryan thought for a moment and then expressed what had been on his mind for the past several days. "Yes, there is something you can do. Help Miss Dennis and Reynolds to get home. They don't want to stay here. Let them return to the life they want."

Lenai nodded. "I have already told them that they can go just as soon as they want. We'll take them to an island where boats sometimes stop to take on supplies. It will be simple for them to return to the States from there.

"But, how about yourself? You will want to go, too."

Ryan shook his head. "No. I'll stay here. There's nothing for me to return to. If there's anything left for me in life, I'll find it here."

Gently the old man pressed his hand and said, "As you will, son." Then with dignity of age and royalty he left the room.

Came the day of departing. The pitifully small belongings of Reynolds and Jean were packed. After a farewell interview with Lenai they started off with three natives as an escort of honor. Jean had asked Ryan to accompany them to the beach where an outrigger canoe would be awaiting them.

Reynolds walked ahead with the three natives while Jean dropped back to walk with Ryan. The silence was heavy as words were difficult to find.

Finally Ryan broke the silence. "I'm going to miss you, Jean. You're—you're fine. You've helped me to get a new hold on myself."

Jean didn't answer. She just pressed his hand and kept her eyes straight ahead.

The natives led them halfway up the steep hill and then they entered another tunnel. This one was wider and far less difficult to travel than the one through which they had entered the valley.

Jean's and Ryan's footsteps seemed to slow as they came closer to the beach where more of the natives were waiting in the large canoe. Reynolds and the guides had drawn a considerable distance ahead and were all ready waiting at the canoe.

At the bottom of the slop Ryan stopped. "This is it, Jean. I'll say my goodby here."

Slowly Jean turned to face him and then looked up to find his eyes. Who knows what she saw there? But whatever it was he saw the same thing in her eyes. Simultaneously their arms went out to each other and it was like the merging of sky into the sea.

For a long minute they stood, their lips locked. Then together they looked toward the beach.

The canoe had moved out from the beach. In the stern of the boat stood Reynolds, his hands clasped together above his head in a gesture of understanding, and farewell.

THE END.

ADVENTURE IN OLD BABYLON!

You'll Share It In

RICHARD S. SHAVER'S NEXT STORY

COMING IN THE MAY ISSUE

ADVENTURERS OF THE SEA

By WARREN LESSER

Of all of the forms of adventure, that on the sea remains the roughest and the most dangerous!

OF ALL adventure-holders and adventure-seekers, there are none so little publicized as the humble workers who spend most of their lives within reach of the sea's maddest tossings and within hearing of the sea's maddest and insistent roarings. Some of these men who witness all this are young, and some are very old. Some are more interested in sailing upon the waters, and some take more to the flying crafts which circle above the blue, and of late, some are interested keenly in navigating beneath the waters. But in this fashion, no matter which is their calling, all of them carry on, quietly and without pretentiousness, day in and day out, knowing their work must go on, and knowing full well the important part theirs is in the modern world's enormous business.

On the very rare occasions, their names do receive notice and appear in the newspapers for some very extreme bit of valor, but this is the exception, rather than the rule, the rule being that the universe at large hardly ever hears of the multitude of hardships and dangers these men of adventure meet in the everyday routine of their duties and very seldom knows of the signal acts of bravery they perform. This will always be the case of a world so enwrapped in its own worries, it cannot commend another for his great acts of courage, especially when his type of work calls for adventure-packed thrills, which almost always call forth a case of brave deed. And it is not always the cold world's fault, or its lack of interest, which fails to note the heroes of the sea; most of the times it is due to the lack of enthusiasm among these same men to talk of their exploits. Only by persistent, tactful questioning of the heroes themselves, or by diligent search of their diaries and official records, which are very spare when it comes to recording heroic deeds, will one ever be able to penetrate the rough crust of their monumental modesty and be able to unfold the gold which lies beneath.

BUT all this work is worth something, for a sea-faring man will forever more hold in your heart a place which will be filled with admiration and warmth for such fearlessness which is found in every man who puts out to sea, or who works with the men who put out to sea. The knight of the blue, venturing here, there, and everywhere, defies the thousand and one threats of death which challenge him; sometimes the giant-sized octopus does succeed in overpowering him, but not until a most grueling duel has been fought, and human strength and human courage and human ingenuity have been hopelessly outclassed. Only then do the men of the sea lose a fight, for theirs is a heart set for all tasks which deal with the unordinary, the exciting, the thrill-packed moments of adventure.

Anyone who has ever known or read about such men will never afterward sit down before his fire and listen to a howling winter's storm without first giving a silent prayer for those noble men who at that very moment are facing the full brunt of the tempest out on the open waters of the sea, where weather plays its most brutal role.

And it is not just the men in the ships, or under the waters, or above in planes, it is the lighthouse keeper, lonely and undaunted in his castle where he keeps faith with the men who man the ships; he fights an everpresent battle with an almost overpowering urge for sleep, so that he may keep his lamps forever burning and his sirens shrieking, while his little house may at that very moment be shaking under the vibrations of the gigantic waves outside.

OR PERHAPS the fireside warmer will picture a boatful of valiant, ice-frocked coast-guardsmen, who are on their way, struggling desperately to fight and clear a path to a stricken vessel somewhere in the darkness of the ocean.

He will be able to picture other dire scenes, too, such as the storm-tossed seaplane pilots, shivering fishermen in their little dories off the Grand Banks, and the courageous men of the submarine, scooting beneath the troubled waters, narrowly missing this and that sunken obstacle.

But no picture, no matter how vividly the imagination is called upon to draw, can ever be too far-fetched to belittle the perils of the men of the sea, these brave fellows, who are constantly exposed to all types of adventure, imposed by weather, by nature, and often by man-made enemies. All the honor should go out to these men who themselves go out, and return ashore uncomplainingly, just considering it all a part of the day's work!

WOLF CHILDREN OF MIDNAPORE

By GARY LEE HORTON

IT WAS on one of his missionary tours, in October, 1920, that the Reverend Singh first discovered Kamala and Amala. He had taken shelter for the night in a native's cowshed, on the borderland between Midnapore and Morbbanj. His host told Dr. Singh that the whole village lived in dread of a Manush-Bagha (man-ghost) which roamed the forest about seven miles from the village. He pleaded with the missionary to stay and demolish the wicked spirit.

At dusk on the following day, Dr. Singh mounted a high platform in the trees, built for hunting, and waited for the appearance of this strange beast who was described to be like a man in the limbs, but with the head of a ghost. The spirit was thought to dwell in a high cave. Dr. Singh waited expectantly. Suddenly, from out of the cave came a grown wolf, followed, in succession, by three cubs. And following close after the cubs came the ghost—a terrifying spectacle, man-like in body but with the look of the untamed animal, matted hair and bright piercing eyes. And this ghost seemed to have a duplicate, a younger version, who came uncertainly out of the cave in its wake.

Dr. Singh stared, fascinated. These "ghosts" were really children, evidently abandoned by their parents, and miraculously saved and suckled by a mother wolf. He determined to dig out the cave and get the children. But when he tried to enlist the help of the natives, they flatly refused, explaining that if they tampered with the ghosts the Manush-Bagha would probably destroy the whole village.

Dr. Singh was forced to hire some people from a distant village. First, they routed out the wolves. The mother wolf was furious at the diggers, and they were compelled to kill her. When they reached the cave, they found the two hideous beings and the wolf cubs huddled together. The diggers took the cubs, and the missionary took charge of the human children. He brought them back to the missionary Orphanage where they were accepted simply as neglected children. Only Mr. and Mrs. Singh knew the secret of their past. It was decided to name the elder, who was about eight years old, Kamala, and the younger, only a year and a half, Amala.

With the matted hair cut from their head, the two wolf-children seemed almost human. But still their flat noses quivered at the smell of raw meat, and after midnight their eyes glowed like a cat or a dog in the dark. The only sound that they made was an eery cry or howl in the dead of the night, neither human nor animal. It began with a hoarse call and ended with a piercing, shrill wail. It was their vocabulary.

When they were hungry, they would come smelling to the place where the food was put, eating and drinking like dogs, by lapping the plate with their tongues. They could not stand upright but ran about on all fours like squirrels.

In the beginning of September in 1921, Amala and Kamala both fell ill, and despite all efforts to save her, Amala died on the 21st. Kamala appeared greatly agitated by the death of her sister. Two teardrops fell, one from each eye—her first recorded tears.

Continuous massage to free muscles for human use was tenderly administered by Mrs. Singh, and gradually Kamala gave up roaming with her animal friends about the yard, and began to accept food and drink from Mrs. Singh's hand. At this time, her behavior was like that of a baby of one and one-half years.

Kamala's humanizing continued. In 1922, she learned to walk on her knees and to swing. Still, her animal background was not forgotten, as when, finding a dead chicken in the yard, she seized it in her jaws, and ran on all fours to the shelter of the bushes. When she emerged, later, there were telltale feathers and bits of meat on her lips and cheek. When she was questioned, she nodded, "Yes."

After years of patient teaching, Mrs. Singh was finally able to get Kamala to stand upright on June 10, 1923. Although able to walk along quite naturally, Kamala was never able to run. By 1924, Kamala had learned to know her clothes, especially the bright-colored ones. Red was her favorite color. By 1925, she was able to drink from a glass which she held herself.

By 1927, Kamala had made great strides in her human adventure. She had a vocabulary of 45 words. She showed some affection for her playmates. She now permitted a blanket to be placed over her at night. Though once she had preferred the darkness, now she shared the other children's timidity of the dark. Though once animals had been her only friends, she now went out of her way to avoid dogs. And instead of refusing clothes, she would decline to go for a walk with the other children unless she was dressed like them. Her humanization process had brought her to the level of a child of three.

Scientists from all over the world came to see the wolf-child, for here was living proof of an old scientific problem. Would a child raised among wild animals lose its right to a human nature?

On September 26, 1929, Kamala fell ill. All the doctors in town attended her, but there was nothing they could do. Kamala, the wolf-child, died on November 25th, retaining full understanding and the ability to speak, to the end.

SECRETS OF THE SEA

By R. CLAYTON

THE unfathomable sea has been the setting of some of the world's greatest mysteries. One of the most amazing of these took place in 1855.

On February 28 of that year, one of the crew aboard the sailing ship "Marathon" sighted the hulk of another vessel looming across the gray waves of the Atlantic. Acting on orders from the captain, the "Marathon" directed her course toward the other ship. Finally the "Marathon" was close enough so that the captain was able to distinguish the name of the other ship. She was an American boat, too, called the "James Chester." Across the intervening waves the "Marathon's" captain hailed the "James Chester," but the other boat did not answer. Curious, he ordered a boat lowered, and set out to board the silent ship.

The "James Chester" was searched minutely, but not a living thing was found. Everything was in a state of wild disorder, yet there was no proof of actual violence aboard this ghost ship. No traces of blood, no weapons, no signs of struggle were found.

What was even more mysterious was the whereabouts of the crew, for every boat on the "James Chester" was hanging in its place. The ship was as staunch as the day she was launched.

No trace of the crew was ever found. What was this fearsome thing that threw the boat into such a panic? Is it possible that the crew ended their lives by jumping into the boundless ocean in a kind of mass suicide? The ship was silent. The mystery was chalked up to the sea who guards her secret jealously to this day.

ONCE a proud Russian steamer, the *Ivan Vassili* is now a ghost ship, for no man will set foot aboard her.

It was early in 1903 on a trip to Vladivostok that the hand of the unseen murderer first struck aboard the *Ivan Vassili*. Describing this ghostly menace, the crew said that its first effect was a sudden feeling that an unseen being was standing near-by. Then all of the sailors were filled with a wave of unutterable terror. Some said that they could detect a faintly luminescent mist, vaguely resembling a human being floating about the ship.

Just before the ship reached Port Arthur, one of the crew ran screaming on the deck. This was the signal for general frenzy. Soon the whole crew ran blindly about, praying, shouting, and asking deliverance from the horrible menace of the invisible death. This mob frenzy continued until one of the seamen, Alec Govinsk, jumped overboard with a wild cry. Then the others brought their fears under control, and their terror subsided.

But the invisible murderer still stalked the ship. On the next lap of the voyage two seamen killed themselves, one dying of fright. At Hongkong the whole crew deserted.

With a new crew and captain, the ship set sail for Sydney. On the voyage, the captain, Chris Hansom, committed suicide. Then the *Ivan Vassili* started for San Francisco. The new captain killed himself; three men screaming that they had seen "the thing" jumped overboard. After that, no man would board her again, and the stout sailing steamer had to be abandoned to the hands of the invisible death.

★ AN HEROIC MEDIC ★

By JEFFRY STEVENS

IN 1849, yellow fever was brought to Brazil, when an American boat docked in Bahia with a case of the fever aboard. Natives immediately contracted the disease and year after year it spread. Between 1891 and 1894, 15,000 people died in Rio alone. Everywhere it was said, "Brazil is diseased—Brazil is a land of living death."

Brazil's health authorities sought medical advice the world over, but attempts to curb the disease failed. Survivors became a national health problem, trade declined, industrial and property losses were beyond estimate.

In 1904, Dr. Oswaldo Cruz organized his famous Mosquito Brigade. Dressed in khaki uniforms, armed with brooms, kerosene and spray guns, the brigade set out to clean up the epidemic pools. A million and a half reservoirs, tanks, gutters and stagnant water receptacles were cleaned—and kept clean. Buildings were evacuated and city blocks were dynamited.

The population of Rio was up in arms. The hysterical mob besieged Dr. Cruz's home.

In spite of all the turmoil the city's death toll from yellow fever dropped in one year from 584 to 48. The once most hated man in Rio was now its most honored citizen.

In 1915, Dr. Cruz's health broke. Suffering from heart disease, hardly able to walk, and almost blind, he died on February 11, 1917, at the age of 44. The city of Rio went into mourning and all of South America paid homage to one of the most heroic disease fighters in medical history.

PANAMA ADDER

by H. B. Hickey

One arm silenced the guard while the other brought down the knife

I ONCE spent a vacation in Central America and Brazil. The scenery was magnificent and the people were more than pleasant. But in Mexico I had to drink boiled water and eat only cooked vegetables. In Nicaragua the precautions didn't help. I got dysentery. I didn't want to go back.

First I was adamant. Mr. Grimsby said I was pig-headed. I didn't want to be pig-headed, so I was firm. Mr.

Blackwell was like a snake—a Panama adder that had to be crushed—and Bill was the man to do it. He had to destroy him because of Mary . . .

Grimsby said I was obstinate. No matter what stand I took, he found an extremely unpleasant name for it. Frankly, he hurt me; I didn't want to be any of those unpleasant things.

So I tried to put myself in a better light.

"Mr. Grimsby," I said pleadingly, "it isn't that I don't want to go to South America and buy straw hat bodies for you. I just feel that I'm not qualified for the job."

"I say you *are* qualified!"

How could I argue that? Mr. Grimsby taught me everything I know about the straw hat business. It would have been both ungrateful and untrue to say he had taught me poorly. He fluttered his fingers over his thin, snow white hair and smiled gently and a little sadly.

"If we don't show a good line of panamas for next summer we'll be out of business, Bill," he told me. "The war and bad luck have played havoc with us. We lost 20,000 dozen bodies in one torpedoing alone. The next year—"

I interrupted him. "I know. After all, I'm your factory superintendent. But I still think a man like Stern, say, would do better."

Mr. Grimsby shook his head. "He's too old, Bill; and it's a young man's job."

"So is running this factory," I said. "It takes a young man to cope with that mob of women, kids, and congenital drunks who call themselves hatmakers nowadays."

"Someone who knows how to handle people, eh?"

"Well—"

"Precisely, Bill. Precisely." He came around the desk and put his arm on my shoulder. "Bill, why do you think I took an errand boy and made a packer of him? And a finisher? And a foreman? And sent him to work in retail stores so he could learn first hand what the public wanted? And educated him and made him superintendent?"

"Because I could handle people?"

"That's right. It's what is sometimes called leadership."

"But what has that to do with panama bodies?" I was bewildered.

"Just this." He turned and faced the map of South America which hung behind his desk. My eyes followed his finger as it pointed out the district from which our panamas came. Each manufacturer had almost a monopoly on the output of a district.

Mr. Grimsby went on. "As you know, our entire business rests on the shoulders of the Indians who weave those bodies. Despite the fact that they are miserably poor and ignorant we have never run into trouble with them. But now, just as we are in a position to recoup our losses, something has gone wrong down there. I have word that they have practically stopped weaving."

THIS was serious! It was worse than that; it was catastrophe! We couldn't build up new sources in less than two years. And in the meantime we'd have to buy bodies from our competitors. In either case we were washed up.

"So that's the story, Bill. Unless—"

"You can stop selling me," I said; "I'm going. How soon do you want me to leave?"

He opened the top drawer of his desk and took out an envelope. "Well, I got this ticket for the day after tomorrow."

I pretended to be sore. "Why didn't you say so in the first place? You would have saved me all that arguing." But I liked it. It was more like a father and son than an employer and em-

ployee to me.

The ship wasn't very big, but the first day out Mary Shelton stayed in her cabin so I didn't get to meet her. After the second day I tried not to let her out of my sight. She didn't seem to mind.

I won't say she was unusual. Her hair was medium brown and went well with her hazel eyes, and her skin was a healthy tan. Her figure was nothing to be ashamed of and she wasn't ashamed of it. She wore a sun suit that was just revealing enough.

And she liked me. When I lifted her up on the rail so I could snap a picture of her with her camera she made me feel that I was *so* strong without saying a word. The top of her head came just to my mouth, and I quickly discovered that she used that head for more than a hat stand. Everything would have been just perfect if not for Russell Blackwell.

Blackwell was strictly a long oval. He had a low cephalic index. He was dolichocephalic. What I mean is that he had a long, narrow head.

You can't help judging people according to the business you're in, and I'm in the hat business. Any hat clerk will tell you that he feels like ducking out the back door when he sees a long oval coming. Normal heads are best, of course; most hats are made for them. Wide ovals will take a couple of pads if necessary. But long ovals! The better manufacturers have had to make special blocks for them so they wouldn't drive the salesmen crazy.

The worst of it is that long ovals are as fussy as they are hard to fit. If the salesman says the brim is two and one-half inches wide, it turns out that Mr. L. O. has micrometer eyesight and yells for a ruler so he can prove it's only two and fifteen thirty-seconds of an inch. Not all of them are that bad, of course. Blackwell made up for those who aren't.

On the third day out of New York he appeared on deck in a white suit and a pith helmet. As soon as he saw the attention I was giving Mary he ambled his lanky body in our direction. Mary introduced him to me and he gave me five thin, but hard fingers to shake. Although he was about my own age his hand was cold and I dropped it at once. He gave me a sardonic look and got personal right away.

Mary seemed to know him pretty well. For her sake I was polite. I told him what business I was in and what firm I represented. When he asked where I was leaving the boat I told him Panama City.

Blackwell acted like he had caught me with my hand in the poor box. "Oh, really?" He unveiled a look that said you must think I'm an awful umpchay, Mr. Mason, and brought his verbal axe down on my head.

"Panama hats don't come from Panama, you know," he said. Mary's gasp made it seem as though he had lifted a pebble and revealed me underneath with a black cloak and dagger.

I hated to spoil Blackwell's fun. "Yes, I know," I told him. "Most of them come from Ecuador, some from Colombia, and a few from Peru. I can even distinguish them by sight. You must have got that nugget of knowledge from one of those 'Can This Be True?' columns."

Hoping I had got him out of my hair for a while, I led Mary to a secluded spot where we could talk. She was feminine enough to lead off with a question.

"Why are you going to Panama City, Bill?"

"For a very simple reason; to see a man. From there I'll fly to Quito."

"Oh. And was that really true about the hats not coming from Panama?"

"Yes. The reason they're called panama is because the first ones were picked up there by a couple of American sailors and brought back home to be finished. And they're not woven under water, either."

Mary had a clear musical laugh and she gave out with it now. "I always wondered about that. I used to picture a man in a diver's suit braiding straw at the bottom of a river."

"Enough about hats," I said. "Just to make us even, where are you bound for?"

"Guayaquil," she told me. Guayaquil is Quito's port. "I don't know where we'll go from there."

"We?" I asked. "I didn't know you were with someone."

"With two others. Mr. Blackwell and another man. I'm this other man's secretary and Mr. Blackwell is some sort of business associate."

SHE seemed to think she'd said enough because she suddenly leaned over the rail and started to talk about the sea. I don't mean about the beauty of the sea, but rather about what's in it.

In the next half hour I learned exactly how many minerals there are in sea water and about the processes for extracting them. She certainly knew her minerals. But even Mary Shelton couldn't make a lecture on that subject interesting, and I finally called a halt to it.

"Look," I said; "unlike your friend Blackwell, I am not a busybody. Furthermore, you don't owe me an explanation of your private affairs. So if you're trying to avoid the subject, let's discuss something on a higher level than the geologic."

Mary liked that. We discussed other things. That night we had a couple of drinks together and danced—if you call what I do dancing—to the music of the ship's four-piece orchestra. By the fifth day the rest of the passengers were talking about us.

They had no reason to talk. I had got as far as kissing Mary and that was all. It was as far as I was going to get and I knew it. And I didn't care. I have spent many less pleasant days than those. Besides, we had a chaperone.

At first I wondered if Blackwell had a crush on me, the way he stuck so close. But he wasn't that kind; and then I noticed that he showed up only when Mary was around. In one way she didn't seem to mind him, and yet when he was near I could feel the tension mount in her. She never said anything but I could see she was a little afraid of him.

As for me, the more I saw of him the less I liked Blackwell. We had our one and only serious clash the night before we docked at Panama City, as the ship swung toward the Canal. That was when I found out Blackwell packed a gun.

I stayed in my cabin for a couple of hours after dinner, getting my things packed and a few letters written for mailing first thing in the morning. Then I went up on deck and looked around for Mary. She wasn't in her deck chair; she wasn't at the bar, and she wasn't in any of the places where I could usually find her.

Maybe her mysterious employer had got a rush of dictation to the head, I thought. I would have liked to meet him but he never gave me a chance. Not once while he was on board did he come out of his cabin. So I thought it best not to go below in search of Mary. While waiting, I took a turn around the deck.

It was on the other side of the ship,

just as I passed a lifeboat that threw a long, black shadow, that I heard a woman let out a thin cry of pain. It was dark in the angle between the lifeboat and the rail, but even in the dark I recognized Blackwell's white suit.

He had Mary against the rail with her hands pinned behind her. And his breathing was so harsh I didn't know whether he was kissing her or biting her. Either way, she wasn't liking it; her feet were kicking ineffectually against his shins.

BLACKWELL was too intent on what he was doing to hear my approach. The first intimation he had that things weren't going to be all his way was when I grabbed his shoulder. As I pulled him away from Mary with my right hand, I brought the edge of my left palm down on his forearm. He let out a squeal and loosed his clutch on Mary.

He never had a chance to defend himself. I had him off balance as I twirled him about, and then I grabbed both his lapels and lifted. His feet swung up off the ground.

Fortunately for him I had turned too, or he would have gone over the rail when I heaved him outward and away from me. Blackwell's body turned slightly in mid-air and he made a perfect three point landing on his shoulders and the back of his head. He skidded up against the cabin wall.

And then I found out something about him I'd never suspected. That lanky body had the resiliency and toughness of spring steel. He had no more than landed than he had his feet twisted behind him and he kicked away from that wall like a swimmer turning in a pool.

He caught me coming in and I folded as his shoulder hit my belly. How he managed to get his feet back on the deck so quickly I don't know, but it was his fists that straightened me up again. Those fists were balls of iron and they came so fast and from so many sides at once that there was no defense against them.

Blackwell had learned to scrap in a school where they played for keeps. Busy as he was with his hands, he somehow contrived to get in some well intentioned kicks too. That they failed to hit vital spots was simply my good fortune and no tribute to my agility.

I couldn't duck. Blackwell's speed and ferocity had caught me off guard and now his blows were beating befuddlement into my brain. Mary told me later that she screamed. I never heard her.

A primitive instinct was telling me to get my hands on Blackwell. But it didn't tell me how. Can you stop a cyclone by standing in the center of it and spreading your arms?

I was through and Blackwell knew it. He stopped moving and planted his feet for the finishing punch as I fell toward him. And by blind luck I caught his wrist as his uppercut drove for my jaw. My falling weight dragged him toward me and my other hand closed on his upper arm.

Blocking machines with their fingers of steel are new in the hat game. When I was a blocker we pulled those raw bodies down on the wooden blocks by hand. And we did it for ten hours a day. Our favorite sport was cracking brazil nuts between our fingers.

I came back from the brink of the black abyss to hear Blackwell's groan in my ear and to feel his feet kicking at my leg and trying to find my groin. But my fingers had reflexed so tight they almost met through his flesh.

Pain softened Blackwell and he wilted. Like a hammer-thrower I whirled and let go. This time he re-

versed the procedure. He hit the wall standing up and crumpled downward.

But he wasn't out yet. Passengers and sailors were running toward us and someone flung open a cabin door. In the light I could see Blackwell struggling weakly upward. It was plain he'd never make it.

And then his hand clawed at his coat, slid inside. Metal glinted dully. I was too far from him, and even as I leaped my stomach sucked inward, waiting for the bullet. It never came.

I KNEW Russell Blackwell then; really knew him. I had discovered the whip toughness his loose exterior hid; now I saw the iron will concealed by his bumbling manner and his foppish white suit and pith helmet.

In my hand that gun would have gone off. He wanted to kill me. But his lips drew thin and his face reflected the struggle between his desire and his will. And reason won; the gun slid back.

"Not now, Mason," I heard him mutter.

It was all right with me. What I wanted in my belly was not a bullet, but a stiff drink. I was content to call it quits.

Mary went down to my cabin with me and helped me wash and clean up. My face and body ached and the skin was scraped off half the length of one shin. But I didn't look too bad. Only one trickle of blood ran from my mouth. The red welts and bruises that Blackwell's knuckles had made didn't show much under my after-shave powder.

She hadn't said a word since we came down. Now she suddenly spoke. "I'm sorry, Bill," was all she said.

"Forget it," I told her. "It wasn't your fault. What I don't like is the idea of leaving you and Blackwell tomorrow."

She reassured me. "Don't worry. I'm not going to give him another chance to pull the same trick."

"Maybe," I suggested, "if you talked to your boss he would tell Blackwell to stay away from you."

Mary's answer to that didn't make me feel any better. "I'm afraid that wouldn't do any good, Bill. But I can take care of myself."

I figured I was entitled to ask a few questions. "Are you sure it isn't Blackwell himself you're working for? And just who is this employer of yours? Hasn't he got a name?"

Her eyes met mine in a level gaze. "I can't answer those questions. And I imagine the reason Blackwell has stuck so close to me was to make sure I didn't answer any like them."

"I'll bet!" I snorted. "Any business he's connected with wouldn't bear too close scrutiny."

Mary laughed that off. "You're too suspicious, Bill. There's a perfectly reasonable explanation for the secrecy."

I let it go at that. There was no use asking any more questions that she wouldn't answer. And she could be right about Blackwell not annoying her further.

I said, "Well, let's go up on deck and watch the ship go through the locks. It's our last evening together for a while."

She shook her head. "Sorry, Bill. I won't be able to. In fact, I was trying to find you to say goodbye, when—when that happened."

"What do you mean, 'goodbye'?" I blurted. "How about tomorrow? You'll be able to go ashore for a few hours when we dock, won't you?"

"No. I—I'll be busy all day and I just won't have time."

That was all. It was a lame excuse, but there were only two things I could do; be a sorehead, or assume there was

a good reason why she couldn't tell me the truth.

Which meant there was really only one way to act. So I said, "Okay. Maybe I'll see you in Ecuador."

I guess it didn't sound the way I'd intended. Or maybe I should have kissed her quickly, to show I understood.

Mary's face paled slightly. "Sure, Bill. Maybe we'll get together." Then she turned and walked out.

All right, sister, I thought. Have it your way. A man can take just so much on faith and no more. But maybe it's better not to get too chummy with a gal who works, supposedly, for a man who's got to keep his identity a secret. And whose travelling companion acts like a sissy and is a killer if ever I saw one. Besides, I'm down here on business.

MORNING found me ready to go. As soon as the gangplank went down I took my luggage, my letters, and my aches and bruises and left the ship. Mary wasn't on deck. Neither was Blackwell, but I didn't miss him.

Heat and humidity are inseparable in that part of the world, and they make a combination that drives the energy from a man. By the time I had got myself installed in a hotel room I was wringing wet. I ordered up a tall, cold drink.

Then I made my phone calls. They were all to exporters of South American straw braids. And to a man they were sold up. The only one who might help me was out of town and wouldn't be back for three days. There was nothing to do but wait.

I was sorry I waited. Alfredo Ruiz had done business with our firm for almost fifty years and he thought A. J. Grimsby was as fine as they came. Ruiz was mahogany brown and he was thin and bald. His voice was soft and liquid. But he couldn't help me.

"I can assure you of an adequate supply of all other straws which might be used as substitutes. That, of course, is merely a precaution."

The various palmetto braids are nice additions to a line of panamas but they're no substitutes. "We'll be forced to try to get along on those if we can't get panamas," I told him. "But I'm afraid it will be a waste of time and money."

He nodded. "I understand that. A dying gesture, one might say. Still, it is all I can offer. Every panama body, good or bad, has already been spoken for. I would be willing to forego my own profit, but the price would still be prohibitive."

I had hardly hoped for more so I wasn't too disappointed. What I wanted most was some light on the situation I was going to run into in Ecuador. Ruiz knew no more than I.

"Rumors, of course. But nothing definite," he told me. "It is a remote section of the country and all one gets is rumors. The Indians have stopped weaving. Since their entire output, you might say, goes to Grimsby, no one else has been too concerned."

"But there must be some talk among the exporters," I said.

"The usual," he admitted. "It means nothing. Nobody really knows anything definite. You will have to go there yourself. My only advice is to hire a good guide and to be careful. Those Indians can be dangerous."

Senor Ruiz could do only one thing for me. He got me an immediate reservation on the plane to Quito. That was something. I was sick of stewing in Panama, and if I had no more success in Ecuador, at least I would be comfortable.

Quito was cool and springlike. Grimsby had told me it would be. "It's

always spring in Quito," he had said. Around it the Andes rose higher than anything I'd ever seen before, so that the city, at 9,000 feet, was nestled in a valley.

Except for the government buildings, the university, and a couple of cathedrals, it was just an old world city with narrow, up and down streets.

I didn't waste any time. Before I went up to my room—one-fifty a day U. S. currency for a suite—I asked the clerk about a guide. He said I shouldn't worry; he'd fix me up with the best guide in all Ecuador.

Ten minutes later he called me to say the best guide was out of town but he was sending up the second best. When I saw him I couldn't help wondering what the bad ones looked like.

Luis Sucre was about eighteen and I doubted whether he'd had one square meal in all his eighteen years. His cotton pants were cuffless and frayed at the bottom; and his dark straw hat was unravelling at the brim. His shirt was literally nothing to speak of.

BUT I did need a guide. So I hauled out my limited Spanish vocabulary and started to explain what I wanted.

"I speak North American," Luis interrupted me quietly.

That was my first surprise. My second came when I saw his eyes. They were black and shiny and very intelligent. Things began to look up.

I told him where I wanted to go. He caught on right away. "Yes, senor Mason. It is southeast of Cotopaxi, on the east slope of the Andes. Very primitive Indians."

I didn't like that crack. "You are Spanish, I suppose" I said. In South America everyone who can speak two words of English stops being an Indian.

Not Luis Sucre. He was an Indian and an Ecuadorian and proud of both. He stood very straight when he told me so. We were going to get along.

"Have you ever been in that section of the country?" I asked.

He was honest. "No, senor. But have no fear; I am quite experienced. And few of the other guides speak North American."

I reassured him. "Don't worry. You're hired. Now, how about the price? What do you usually charge for a trip like this?"

Luis shrugged. "There is no set fee, senor. Would five dollars a day be all right?"

"Sounds reasonable," I said. I pulled out ten dollars and handed it to him. "Here's two days pay in advance."

He gulped, looked at the bill, and tried to hand it back. "I must be honest, senor Mason. I meant five dollars Ecuadorian. You could hire five guides for this much money."

Just for that I made him take it. Then I got out a map and we discussed the best way of getting where I wanted to go. There was no rail line and the roads were uniformly bad. That left us one choice; horses. Luis figured that a couple of good horses would get us there in four days.

It didn't look that far to me and I said so. Luis smiled. "That is the montana, senor; the forests. Very thick, very wild."

Then he drew up a list of supplies. It sounded all right except for the food and the rifles. There wasn't enough of the former, and I couldn't see why we needed the rifles at all.

Luis gladly doubled the amount of food. But he insisted on the rifles. "Just for safety's sake," he smiled.

I was going to argue. Maybe the Indians wouldn't like it if I came to do business with a gun in my hand. Something happened just then that made me

change my mind.

It sounded like a demonstration at first. There was a lot of shouting suddenly in the street outside the hotel. Luis beat me to the window, but made room for me and we watched.

It was a parade. There were a lot of young people marching and some of them carried signs. I couldn't read them, but before I could ask Luis what they said it wasn't a parade any more.

Four men came out of a doorway almost opposite the hotel. All of them carried pistols. They planted their feet flat on the pavement and fired point-blank into the marchers until their guns were empty. Then they ran.

But they had tarried too long. From the other direction a motorcycle roared up and spun to a skidding, screeching stop that lifted the cop in the sidecar out of his seat.

With oiled smoothness and precision that bespoke much practise, he landed on his feet, whirled, and dropped behind the motorcycle as the driver tilted it to form a barricade before them. And then the rivetting of a machine gun smothered the bark of the driver's pistol as the sidecar man went into action.

They caught the four gunmen against the wall of the building across from the hotel. The four went down like men tripping over a wire. There was no doubt they were dead, but the bullets kept poking them like invisible fingers.

I turned away and went to the bed and sat down. Luis stayed at the window until the firing was over. When he came toward me his face was without expression.

"My god," I said weakly, "what was that?"

He shrugged. "A demonstration. We don't have them often."

"I should hope not. But what's it all about? Have I stepped into a revolution?"

Luis explained it to me. "The ones who carried the signs are university students. They are Republicanos, in favor of the present government. The four assassins were no doubt Perezistas."

A little knowledge of a country's politics can always come in handy so I asked Luis to explain further. "Excuse my ignorance, please, but what are Perezistas?"

THE gist of it was this: Ecuador had been dictator- ridden for years. The last of the dictators was Alfredo Perez. He was also the worst, and the people revolted successfully and he fled the country. Now rumor had it that he was back in Ecuador to try to overthrow the democracy which had been set up.

"Naturally," Luis went on, "his followers are eager for his return. During his regime they grew fat with graft, and there are thousands of them. But we, the young people, have had a taste of democracy and we are prepared to fight for it."

It was the old technique. By turning an orderly parade into a riot the Perezistas hoped to create a demand for a strong government. Of course, they would be that government.

"But how about the Indians?" I wanted to know. "How interested are they in all this?"

Luis shook his head sadly. "Unfortunately, not at all. As I told you, they are very primitive."

Well, I felt sorry for the Indians, but at the same time I was happy that they weren't mixed up in politics. It wouldn't make my job any easier if they were. Furthermore, the whole affair seemed a little premature to me. The Perezistas weren't even sure their

leader was in the country.

We turned our attention to preparations for the trip. After two days of searching we uncovered three horses which looked like they wouldn't collapse under our weight and gear. Then we bought the rifles and the provisions. Early the third morning we were on the way.

It turned out Luis was right about how fast we could go. The land was straight up and down, and sometimes it looked as though the cornfields we saw were growing sideways out of the mountain.

Then there were no more cornfields. The Andes were all around us, and in the distance we could see Chimborazo's peak, looking its twenty thousand feet and more as it cut into the blue Andean sky.

The volcano Cotopaxi was quiet as we went around it, for which I was thankful. Luis had told me what it could do when it got going.

He had worked it out so that we came onto the eastern slopes far to the north of our destination. We cut our way down through clearings in the brush around the edge of the forests and then worked south on more level ground.

The montana was above us now, stretching as high as we could see, an impenetrable black-green forest. Luis named most of the trees: the *cinchona* and the *hevea,* for instance. But I wasn't interested in quinine or rubber. Only the tree called *carludovia* meant anything to me, and there were plenty of those.

It is from the leaves of that tree that panamas are made. The Indians strip the fibers from the leaves and then soak them until they are flexible. Then, starting at the center, they weave the fibers into hats. The children work on the poorer grades and the most experienced men work on the finer hats. A very fine hat may take as much as six months of spare time work.

But there was no weaving going on in Mapala when Luis and I got there. We were greeted by a pack of mangy dogs, some naked kids, and some frightened women. While Luis calmed the women I looked around.

The village was miserably poor, consisting of thatched huts which leaned at impossible angles. One, larger and more upright than the others, looked like it might belong to the head man.

Around Mapala the land was gray and stony. Shrivelled shoots in ordered rows were struggling to grow up to be corn, but the way it looked to me they weren't going to make it.

By that time Luis had made some headway with the women, using some Indian dialect. I let them touch me to prove I was friendly and then I gave the kids some dried beef. They gobbled it up without troubling to chew it.

"Ask them why they're not weaving hats," I urged Luis.

At great length he asked them. In reply he got a sad shrug of the shoulders. Luis tried again with earnest gestures to denote the importance of the matter.

FINALLY one of the women took pity on him. The others threw reproachful glances at her but she was a tall, queenly woman and didn't seem to care much for their opinion. She talked to Luis for all of ten minutes.

I was a little anxious by then. "Well?" I demanded.

"She says they have no time," Luis told me.

"No time? That's about all they have got!"

Luis tried again. He even got insistent. Under pressure even the tall

woman grew surly and at last she snapped something in reply which silenced Luis.

He turned back to me. "There's something strange going on here," he said. "They get scared when I ask them why they have no time."

"I can see that," I nodded. "But what did she say to you just now?"

"She said to wait for the men."

"Ask her where they are and when they'll be back."

This time Luis got his answer in a hurry. Then the tall woman turned her back on him and walked away.

He looked at me sadly. "She says they'll be back when they get here."

I patted him on the shoulder. "Don't take it to heart. Women are the same no matter where you find them. We'll find out what it's all about when the men get here."

In the meantime we got our gear off the horses and unsaddled them. Just south of the village a cold, clear stream bubbled down from the mountain and after we'd had a drink ourselves we watered the horses and tied them under a shady tree. I didn't like the hungry looks the women tossed at the well fed animals.

Luis and I were left strictly to ourselves. The women vanished inside their huts and the kids and dogs played at a distance. But there was no spontaneity in the children's play and the odor of fear hung over Mapala.

I couldn't help wondering where the men had gone. Mapala, miserable as it is, is the most important of the villages in that province, and I thought the men might have gone to confer with some neighboring villagers. At Mapala the produce of the district is gathered together and carried on the natives' backs to Riodomba. From there it goes to Quito and then to Guayaquil.

At Mapala a sundial would be no good in the afternoon. There are no short shadows that get progressively longer. One minute the sun is east of the Andes and the next minute it has dipped over the crest of the mountains, and it is almost twilight.

When night comes it is sudden and dramatic, like a crash of thunder. Somewhere west of where we sat and waited the sun had dropped into the Pacific. Luis told me the legend of the Quitus, about the animal who half encircled the world and had a head at both ends. One head swallowed the sun and it was night. When the other head spit it out, that was morning.

Sitting there within the semicircle of fires the women had lit in the lee of the Andes, with the wind whispering down through the montana, I thought the legend seemed plausible.

But the men did not come. The women sat near the fires, their faces tense and watchful. Their eyes were south, at right angles to the mountains, and they did not talk. Luis and I didn't have much to talk about either, and after a while we both were half asleep.

SHRILL voices roused us. The women were gathered in a gesticulating, jabbering group around the farthest fire. They paid no attention to us when we came up, but continued their excited talk.

Luis listened for a moment. Then he turned to me. "The men are coming," he said.

I peered into the darkness to the south and made out in the distance a flicker of light. As the light came closer it first became a line of fire, and then broke into the flame of separate torches.

The men moved fast. Within a half hour we saw them in the light of the torches, a double file of marching men. They were in the close order of a war party.

Then they were in the village. There must have been a hundred of them, a ragged crew of barefoot Indians. All had knives at their belts and most carried bows and quivers of arrows. A tall, thick chested Indian in the lead carried an ancient rifle.

The women fell on them with shouts of joy and as the group split up I saw that it was a hunting party. One of the men shouldered a small, deer-like animal, and on a pole they carried the carcass of a jaguar.

In the excitement the men had failed to see us. Now, as Luis started forward, I held his arm. "Better wait until they get settled," I told him.

We went back into the shadows and watched the women bring out great pots and set them to cooking over the fires. The animals were skinned and cut into pieces which were evenly distributed among all.

It wasn't much of a feast by any standards but they made the most of it. The kids got the greatest share of the half cooked meat; the men and women ate a thick soup. To the dogs went bones and bits of hide.

When they were finished, Luis and I stepped forward. I had already figured out that the thick chested Indian was the leader, and it was to him that Luis spoke. It turned out that the chief, as well as the elders, spoke a fair enough Spanish so that I could get the gist of what he said.

His nose was too thin and his mouth too cruel to suit me. But his eyes were friendly enough, and his voice was pleasant when he spoke. His name was Texpkactl.

"We greet Senor Mason," he said simply.

I acknowledged the greeting and got down to brass tacks. Between Luis and myself we explained that I was the representative of the great company which was the purchaser of the hats woven in Mapala. I wanted to know why they weren't weaving.

Texpkactl thought it over and discussed the matter with a couple of the other men. Then he gave me his answer.

"We must go far afield in search of food, as you can see. Therefore we have no time for weaving."

That didn't seem reasonable to me. The forests above us must have plenty of game, besides wild fruits and berries. Through Luis I said as much.

The chief looked as though he wished I hadn't brought that up. He held a full scale pow-wow with the rest of the men before he answered my argument.

Finally he turned back to me. "The montana is taboo," he said, as though that explained everything.

I knew what that meant, all right. As long as anything is taboo they won't go near it for love or money. But if Texpkactl thought I was going to be satisfied with that for an explanation he was doomed to disappointment.

If the montana was out of bounds now, why hadn't it been before?

The chief was worried. He didn't want to answer that. On the other hand, in ordinary years the money the Indians made from their spare time weaving often meant the difference between eating and starving.

His voice sank to a whisper and he looked anxiously toward the montana as he spoke. "The Quitus have returned."

That seemed to make more sense to Luis than to me, so I held a quick consultation with him. He gave me a thumbnail explanation.

THE Quitus were an almost legendary race who lived in Ecuador before the Incas came up from Peru and took over the country. Then the

Spaniards wiped out the Incas. But many of the Indians in this part of the country claimed descent from the Quitus and worshipped the ancient gods. One of the legends said that the ghosts of the Quitus would return some day.

I nodded to let Texpkactl know I understood, but acted as though I wanted more information. He went on:

"There have been signs. First there was the rumbling of thunder in the ground as the graves opened. Then our best hunters failed to return from the montana."

"How long has this been going on?" I wanted to know.

"Many months. Since the ghosts have come we set fires at night to keep them from the village. And we do not go into the forests. It would be death."

I felt like laughing. Then I wanted to tell him to stop talking like a child. But I did neither. I would have been washed up if I had. These people take their legends as seriously as we take ours.

I nodded seriously to show I understood. But all the time my mind was whirring.

"What do you intend to do?" I asked.

Texpkactl shrugged resignedly. "What can men do against the spirits? Our medicine man took magic into the montana to drive out the spirits. He too vanished."

Looking at it from the viewpoint of the Indians I could see that they were up against it. All they could do was wait until the Quitus went away. But I couldn't afford to wait. What if they had taken up permanent residence?

"What do you think would happen if I went into the montana?" I asked Luis in English.

"They would be insulted if you broke their taboo. And even if you came back alive they might decide you were in league with the Quitus."

There was no doubt that Luis was right. The psychology of primitive people is much like our own. I had to approach the problem from their standpoint.

The Indians were ignorant and superstition ridden. But they weren't children. They wouldn't give up their livelihood without a struggle. And there was the disappearance of the hunters and the medicine man to be considered. Something had got them and I had to find out what it was. It was going to take some thought.

"Tell them that I am the leader of thousands in my own country," I said to Luis. "It may be that I can think of a way to get rid of the spirits."

The Indians didn't look like they had much confidence in my ability as a medicine man. I would have to come up with something pretty special if I wanted their cooperation.

IT WAS a great night for sleeping, but sleep was one thing I didn't get. Another shortage was in ideas. I got an idea about once an hour, but it was always the same one. It was simple, logical, and practical. All I had to do was take my gun, go up into the montana, and bring back whatever it was that had got the hunters and the medicine man.

Of course the Indians didn't want me to go into the montana. So Luis and I would pretend to go off on a trip. The next time they saw me I would have solved the whole problem. And I would be saying, "Here you are. Nothing to be afraid of any more."

There was only one thing wrong with that idea. The Indians would hate me for fooling them. And they would hate me even more for proving they were

wrong. It was the wrong approach.

The right approach would be to seem to work *with* their beliefs. That's the way a smart medicine man would do it. I tried to pretend I was an Indian medicine man.

In that case I would probably believe in the spirits of the Quitus. I wouldn't have to pretend.

A surprising thing happened then. There was a return of that feeling I'd had when Luis told me about the beast which swallowed the sun.

It was just before dawn, and the night sounds of the montana were a hum that mingled with the wind to produce a lulling murmur. I was half asleep, half awake.

And I realized that the medicine man of Mapala had gone about it in the wrong way! I let out a sigh of relief and turned over and went to sleep.

But Indian children are up with the sun and so are their dogs. They didn't let me sleep long.

Mapala was whirring with activity as I came out of the hut to which Luis and I had been assigned. Something that smelled like a distant relative of coffee was cooking in the pots. On close inspection it turned out to be coffee, but it had been used so many times that it was almost colorless.

Luis had got up before me. I found him before the chief's hut, talking to Texpkactl and a handful of the older Indians. He must have been giving me a buildup as a powerful chieftain, because they eyed me with respect as I came up. Texpkactl expressed the hope that I had had a pleasant sleep and we exchanged a few formalities.

I WASTED no more time in preliminaries.

"Call your people together," I said to the chief. "There has been revealed to me a plan for freeing the montana of the Quitus."

He looked skeptical, but after all, what could he lose? They didn't even have to hire a hall. Within five minutes Texpkactl, Luis and I were surrounded by the entire population of the village. The elders stood in the front rank, and it was to them and the chief, mainly, that I directed my words.

I made my voice loud and confident.

"You have made a grave mistake," I told them in the best Spanish I could muster. "It is really not your fault, but the Quitus do not know that. And so they have become angry with you."

Texpkactl and the elders didn't know where I was heading. But these were things they understood. They listened attentively.

"Now, who were the first to disappear from your village?" I asked rhetorically. "The hunters, was it not?"

They nodded agreement.

"And who was next? The medicine man, who went to drive the Quitus away with magic! Is that not so?"

They nodded again.

I was using the old trick of the orators. The law of inertia acts the same on people as on objects. Once you have them going in a certain direction they tend to keep going that way. I had made them agree with me twice. That made it easier for them to agree with the rest of what I was going to say.

I fixed my eyes on Texpkactl.

"Think, chief," I said directly to him, "how you would feel if you had been gone from your land and your people for many years. How would you hope to be greeted on your return? With feasts and rejoicing, would you not?"

The chief was pleased that I held him in such high esteem. But he was a modest man and his pleasure was ex-

pressed only by a flicker of emotion in his eyes and by a barely perceptible nod.

"This is how the Quitus felt," I told him. "Having announced their coming, they expected to be met with smiles and gifts. Instead they were met by the hunters.

"How could they know that they themselves were not the hunted? Perhaps, by mistake, one of the hunters tried to harm them and they were forced to retaliate. So their pride was wounded and they became angry. Would you not feel the same?"

Texpkactl's alert features showed he understood what I was getting at. But the others still remained puzzled and I continued.

"Then, instead of rectifying your mistake, you made matters worse. You sent the medicine man to drive them away. You convinced the Quitus that you are their enemies. So they remain in the montana to haunt you and to deprive you of your livelihood."

That sounded pretty reasonable to me. I could tell, by the expressions on their faces, that it sounded plausible to the Indians too.

What most of them didn't see, though, was the answer. But Texpkactl saw it, and I could tell that several of the older men had figured it out too.

This was the most delicate part of the situation. I could have kept talking and given them my solution. But I didn't want to do that. Nobody wants to be told the answer to his problems by an outsider. And it would weaken Texpkactl's position if I seemed to be doing all his thinking for him. So I gave him a chance to get his oar in.

"Wait!" he cried.

He held up his hand so that he could get the Indians' attention and I let him have the floor.

"I have decided what we must do," he told the villagers. While I listened intently to make sure he didn't go off on an unforeseen tack, the Indians crowded around him eagerly to hear his words. Luis interpreted for me.

"We must convince the Quitus that we are friendly toward them," Texpkactl told his people. "We must bring them gifts and sacrifices."

AN EXCITED hubbub broke out among the Indians, a mixed chorus of assent and wonder that they had not thought of that themselves. At the same time I saw a worried frown appear on Texpkactl's brow.

I had been waiting for that frown, expecting it. He had the answer all right, but he didn't see how the village was going to follow through. What kind of gift could they bring, what sort of sacrifice? Mapala had nothing to offer but some mangy dogs.

That was where I came in. Texpkactl threw a perplexed glance in my direction and I caught his eye and motioned him to me. He and Luis and I went off to one side for a consultation.

"What seems to be the trouble?" I asked.

He grunted disgustedly. "You had led us from one difficulty into another. The gifts which Mapala might offer are such that the Quitus would throw them in our faces. And as for a sacrifice—"

I let him know I understood his dilemma, and then let my own troubled gaze wander as though I were giving the matter some heavy thought. Finally my eyes came to rest on my horses, which were still tethered.

Texpkactl's eyes found them too. I thought I detected an envious gleam. For a moment I made no comment. I glanced at him.

Texpkactl got an idea immediately, but I could see he wasn't going to ask for help. I offered it myself.

"Chief," I said, "why not take one of my horses? It would make a magnificent sacrifice. The Quitus would certainly be pleased. Their scowls would turn to smiles."

He demurred just enough to show me how highly he valued my gift. Then he accepted it in the name of his village. He was very happy.

It was the perfect moment to put the finishing touch to my scheme. Everything depended on his acceptance of my next proposition. I put it to him straight.

"I should like the honor of being Mapala's emissary," I told him. "The Quitus' rage against your people may be so great that they will not give you the chance to speak."

His face lightened, and I realized what a load I had taken off his shoulders. For a man who believed there were ghosts in the montana it would have taken more than ordinary courage to venture there. I had asked for an honor which Texpkactl was only too happy to accord me.

MID-AFTERNOON is a poor time to start anything in the tropics, but I had no choice. By the time all the necessary preparations had been made the sun was high overhead.

Luis was permitted to go along as my interpreter. I made certain that he would. There was only one thing I wanted to take along which I was going to have to do without. That was a gun. The only thing that might serve as a weapon was the ancient sacrificial knife Texpkactl produced.

The horse which I contributed was a dappled mare, the slowest and most docile of the three. By dint of much scraping the villagers got together two sacks of dried corn, about ten pounds in each sack, and these were hung by a rope over the mare's back.

Then Texpkactl and three of the elders conducted Luis and me to a point about a hundred yards from the edge of the forest. From there we were on our own.

At first the going was relatively easy; time-worn paths and trails wound like aimless streams into the forest. As we went forward the growth thickened, and the paths converged into a single broad avenue which was overhung by a living green arch that cut off the sun.

Slowly, imperceptibly, the jungle pressed in and narrowed the broad path until we were in single file, Luis in front, then the mare, and last of all myself. At last the trail vanished completely.

We were in a new world now, a world such as must have existed before animal life appeared on the earth. The air was hot and humid and even the birds dozed in obscure perches. Only the vegetation lived, and lived in an eerie fashion that was more animal than plant.

For I could hear it grow! Not a breath of air stirred, and except for the three of us there should have been no sound. Yet the sound was there, and when I closed my eyes for a moment I felt as though I stood in the center of an army of millions which breathed softly and stirred in its sleep. A leaf flicked my face, and I dodged involuntarily as if a tentacle were reaching for me.

Always, ahead of us, was a solid wall of green; behind us was the same wall, and from the sides the growth pressed in like a closing vise. It seemed to me that the largest open space was the size of a pore in a leaf.

Yet Luis found the holes through which we made our way. His black

eyes searched out the spaces between the giant trees and discerned where the undergrowth was least tangled. We made excellent time, almost never pausing for more than a moment, but finally I grew tired.

"Wait a minute," I called up to Luis. "I need a rest."

He turned, nodded, and came back toward me. "We must make it a very short rest, Senor Mason," he warned. "After dark the jungle is a very different place. Then death lurks everywhere, and two men without fire or guns would be—"

He searched for the proper word, and failing to find it snapped his fingers to indicate our life expectancy.

I shrugged. "There isn't much we can do about it, I'm afraid. We don't have much time before dark."

"About an hour," Luis ventured. I dug for my watch and found he was right.

I made a wry face and showed the watch to Luis, but he smiled reassuringly. "Never fear, senor. We shall be out of it in time."

My disbelief must have showed in my expression, but I couldn't help it. As far as I could see, the jungle hadn't thinned by a single leaf. We were stopped on a bit of moss between two trees and there was just enough room to go around one of them. About us were thick curtains of vines and creepers.

I shook my head but Luis insisted smilingly. "You do not realize, senor, but we have been traveling upward all along. The air grows cooler and slowly but surely thinner. That is why you tire more quickly."

HE POINTED to a brilliant orchidaceous plant near us. "An hour ago there were thousands of those. Now they grow few. The character of the other plants has changed too. Another thousand yards or so and we shall be out of this jungle."

For the first time since we had started I became aware of animal sounds. As I got to my feet I heard the chirping and whistling of strange birds and the chattering of some monkey-like animal. And in the distance a jaguar greeted approaching nightfall with a snarl. I was happy that we hadn't far to go.

Just before we started forward again, Luis turned to me. "From here on we must be careful to make no unnecessary sounds," he warned.

I nodded. "I'd hate to have one of those cats after me."

"Not cats," he shook his head. "More dangerous than that."

A single step took him to the side of a tree and he pointed to a spot about six feet from the ground. My eyes followed his finger, and widened in shocked surprise. A four-inch gash had been cut in the trunk!

No animal had made that mark, nor had the ghostly teeth of the Quitus torn off the bark. I examined it closely and saw that the wood had been cut out cleanly and in the form of a wedge. That kind of cut can have only one purpose.

"Someone's blazed a trail along here," I said to Luis. Without thinking I had dropped my voice to a whisper.

He nodded and bent to pick up something from the base of the tree. It was cylindrical and shiny, an empty cartridge. I thought I knew what had happened to the medicine man and the other Indians.

"We'd better move fast," I urged, "and try to follow the blazed trail."

Luis started forward, leading the mare, but I stopped him. "Let's tie her here. We'll make better time

and there won't be any danger of having her whinny at an inopportune moment."

That didn't take long. Nevertheless, we had spent almost fifteen minutes in that one place and it did not seem possible that we would cover a thousand yards in the time remaining before dark. For in order to go up a thousand yards on the gradual slope we had to travel several miles.

I had figured without the signposts along the way. At intervals of fifteen feet or so a gash in the trunk of a tree showed stark white. And enough feet had trod the trail so that the going was comparatively easy. Luis led the way in a slow tireless jog and I stayed behind him as best I could.

THERE was no abrupt change in the landscape. Slowly the vegetation thinned and the ground became harder. Then evergreens appeared, and I knew we were past the worst. Luis stopped in a rocky clearing and I dropped gratefully to a seat on a boulder.

We could see upward to the timberline. Above that the ground was crevassed and barren, but still rolling upward to an incredible height, to a point where the sun was pinned for a moment to the topmost peak. Then a condor sailed across the face of the mountains and dipped its wings as though in a farewell salute; the gesture sprang a trap and the sun was gone, and it was night.

Behind and below us the jungle roared and buzzed and hummed into life. I shuddered as the mare let out a scream of fear mingled with pain that stretched on and on, and suddenly choked off.

Luis touched my arm. "Anaconda," he whispered. It didn't make me feel any better to know just what it was which had killed the mare.

The moon was not high enough yet to furnish much light, so we decided to remain where we were for a while. Luis stretched out full length on the ground and I sprawled on the rock. I was tired enough so that it did not feel too hard.

I almost fell asleep. But just as I started to doze off, the rock quivered and there was a low rumbling in the earth.

Forgetting caution, I yelled, "Avalanche!" We were both on our feet in an instant and headed for the trees.

But it was no avalanche. By the time we reached the nearest tree the rumbling had died. Also, I realized the sound had been too dull.

"Could it be a volcano?" I asked Luis.

He grunted a negative reply. "Not here." I heard him laugh mirthlessly. "Maybe the graves are opening."

I felt his arm and it was steady. He hadn't gone hysterical on me. Just a sense of humor. But it reminded me of my business and I got to my feet. Luis rose beside me.

"Do you wish to chance it in the dark?" he asked.

"Why not? If there's anyone else up here they're not expecting company. And if they're hostile we've got a better chance than in daylight."

As we moved ahead I was still thinking of that rumbling in the earth. There was something vaguely familiar about it. Somewhere I had heard a sound much like it, but I couldn't remember where or when.

Preoccupied as I was, I almost missed the light. At first I thought it was a star; up here they were all as big as walnuts and almost within arms' reach. When I looked again I saw that it couldn't be a star.

The light was not flickering, but steady, except when it blacked out for an instant. It was as though some-

one had passed his hand swiftly across the lense of a small flashlight. I grunted with satisfaction and heard Luis come to a halt.

He walked back toward me, a dim figure in the starlight. "What is it, senor?"

I pointed it out to him. The light was well above us, and far to the right. "Looks like we've found it."

Luis wasn't one to get excited. He squatted in silence for a minute or two and his thinking was almost audible.

"What's the matter now?" I asked.

"I don't know, senor. Maybe nothing. Just a feeling, perhaps."

I knew what he meant. That light was almost too good to be true. It wasn't too bright, and yet anyone within several miles would have been able to see it.

"Like an invitation, eh?" I grunted.

Luis gave me that humorless chuckle again. "Perhaps senor spider invites the flies to a feast."

"You bring the duck," I said. Luis didn't get it; he'd never heard the joke.

UNFORTUNATELY, we had to accept the invitation . . . if it really was one. On thinking it over I decided we were being too suspicious.

"If any one had seen us they wouldn't bother about the light," I figured aloud. "And I doubt whether someone that far away could have heard me yell before."

"Sound travels far up here," he reminded me.

But the decision was up to me and I had to make it. I would have liked to go back for reinforcements. For what? That's what we had come up here to find out.

"We'll try to stick to the trees," I told Luis. "Also, we'll go up above the level of the light. If someone is waiting for us he'll be expecting us to be coming up, not down."

I felt a trifle foolish, playing cops and robbers with shadows. The odds were that the light was serving no sinister purpose. The closer we came to it the more certain I became. By the time we had gone a mile or so I was positive we had been wrong.

A moment later my new theory was shot full of holes. Luis and I almost got the same treatment.

The first blast caught us out in the open, just as we cut across a clearing. There was no warning. Suddenly, from the shadows on the opposite side of the clearing, there came the roar of gunfire and the muzzle flashes of several rifles. The moon was coming up behind us and Luis and I were plainly outlined; our assailants couldn't miss.

But miss us they did. As we doubled and ran for the shelter of the trees, bullets whistled about us like hornets. What the gunmen lacked in accuracy they tried to make up in enthusiasm.

We hit cover just as they ran out of ammunition. By the time they reloaded and opened fire again we were temporarily out of danger. I ducked a low hanging branch, tripped over a stick of deadwood, and came to my feet holding a fair sized rock.

The rock sailed over nearby trees and landed far to our left. It drew gunfire in that direction away from us.

"We'd better go back," Luis whispered, when we paused to catch our breath.

That would have been the most natural thing to do, so I was against it. "No. They're probably expecting us to do just that. Our best bet is to keep heading for the light."

He was a good soldier. I couldn't have blamed him if he'd run out on me. But he grunted and got going again.

The light grew slightly stronger as

we neared it, then vanished as we went higher. After allowing an extra margin of safety we swung to the right.

Vegetation became sparse and the ground grew harder. We went at a half trot which carried us faster than we thought. With no guidepost, we overshot the mark.

On an outcrop of rock we stopped to get our bearings. Below us for some hundred feet the mountainside was clear; then the pine forest began again. Its shadows might have concealed a village. There was nothing to do but go down again and take our chances.

THIS time I was in the lead; without a fixed destination my judgment was as good as Luis'. We went slowly, almost from tree to tree, making no sound. But if we were not alone on the mountainside we had no way of knowing it.

Then, with a suddenness as dramatic as a cannon roar, a door flashed open. Directly below us a shaft of light hit the trees, diffused to show a cluster of cabins. There was a blur of motion as several figures erupted from the open doorway. One of them headed in our direction, and was followed by the others.

A voice yelled, "Shut that door!"

The door slammed shut. In the darkness we could hear the scuffling of approaching footsteps. We didn't move. As long as we stayed put we were safe enough. We lay in a hollow between two tall trees and directly before us was a low, scraggly bush.

Things had taken a turn for the better. We had finally discovered what I had been sure we would discover. There were human beings up here, and they were hostile. But what they were here for, and why they were so quick on the trigger, were more than academic questions to me. We were going to have to stick around.

A snapping stick made a noise like a tiny firecracker and brought me to attention. I squirmed around and looked behind me.

Above us, at the top of the little hollow, a figure was dimly outlined in starlight. It stood fixed and rigid, ready to leap at the slightest sound.

But it was our best break to date. Luis and I were sadly outnumbered, but if we took a prisoner we might get the information I wanted without having to expose ourselves. I touched Luis lightly and pointed at the still figure.

Luis got the idea. A snake would have made twice as much noise as he, as he wriggled up the short incline. I was at his left, but going at snail's speed. I saw him slither up behind the rigid figure, then draw his knees up beneath him. He waited until I got close enough to give him a hand.

Then he sprang. One hand closed over the figure's mouth; the other hand went around the neck and pulled backward. I ducked in low and grabbed for suddenly flailing feet.

We went down in a heap, rolled back to the bottom of the hollow. When we landed I was on top. The fight was out of our captive; his legs stopped kicking.

I worked fast. If our victim was armed I wanted the gun. I slid my hand up to his thighs, his hips. There was no gunbelt, no gun.

My hands went up to the face. It wasn't an Indian's face. The head wasn't covered with Indian hair. It was long hair, but it was wavy and soft. A woman's hair!

SURPRISE made me pull back slightly. Then I got another surprise. Our captive had been playing possum. Sharp teeth dug into my wrist,

wrung an involuntary yelp from me. Woman or not, I started to swing my other fist.

And a beam of light stabbed my eyes, pinned me. I dropped my eyes and saw other beams swing in to light up the hollow. We were surrounded.

Above us a voice spoke in Spanish. "Up with your hands!"

Luis and I put our hands up. So did our former captive.

Then she wasn't one of them. I got my first look at her and felt my mouth drop open in shocked surprise.

Tall and lithe in blue shirt and blue jeans, brown hair, clear brown eyes, and evenly tanned skin, she was—Mary Shelton!

It was her first glimpse of the man she'd bitten a moment before, and the two of us stood gaping at each other with popping eyes and open mouths, like a pair of fish out of water. Finally I got my wits together and made an effort to speak.

"Hello, Mary," was all I could think of.

Before I got past that inane opening one of the men above us came down and shoved a rifle in my back. "Silence!" he snarled.

He was a mean looking character, dirty and unkempt. He looked like he'd be glad of an excuse to shoot me. I shut up.

There were five of them in the gang which had caught us, all armed with rifles. They waved us up out of the hollows and started us on a march down to the cabins. Mary walked close to me, on my right.

"I'm sorry, Bill," she muttered. "I thought you were—"

I grunted disgustedly. "I know. And we thought you were one of them. Just a bad break, that's all."

"Silencio!" the voice behind me said. The rifle barrel jabbed my spine with sadistic force.

We made the rest of the trip without speaking. I saw Luis darting anxious glances about him. He was waiting for an opening for a break. It never came; our captors ranged around us in a tight semi-circle and a couple of them kept their flashlights trained on us.

ONE of the cabins was large, the others small and poorly put together. We were prodded toward the large cabin; it seemed to be the only one which was inhabited. As we approached the door I got a look at something past the corner of the cabin. It looked like a mine shaft, but in the dimness I couldn't be certain.

Then the door swung open and the three of us were herded inside. Mary went first, then I, then Luis. Only one of the armed men followed us into the cabin.

For an instant I was blinded by the light. As I stood blinking I heard a familiar voice, male, but rather high pitched and cool.

"Hello, Mason," the voice said.

I wasn't too surprised. I would have been more surprised if the voice had belonged to someone else. I said, "Hello, Blackwell."

He wasn't wearing his pith helmet, and his white shirt was open at the collar. The sleeves were rolled up above his elbows. He looked even thinner than he had in his white suit, not dangerous at all. I knew better.

Blackwell must have been surprised to see me, but he didn't show it. "Quite a reunion," he said blandly. Old shipmates and all that, you know."

Then he listened attentively while the man who had come into the cabin with us explained how we'd been caught. Blackwell seemed to enjoy the recital. When it was over he nodded, then dismissed the man.

When the door closed and we four were in the cabin alone, Blackwell smiled thinly at Mary. "Rather fortunate that you tried to escape, wasn't it?"

I guess I looked a bit puzzled, and Blackwell's grin broadened. "Yes, that's what Miss Shelton was trying to do. She's a prisoner here." He paused. "And so are you, Mr. Mason."

"I gathered as much," I told him dryly. There was no use getting excited; it wouldn't do any good. Blackwell had the butt of a pistol peeking out above his belt and I had a hunch he was pretty handy with firearms. And he stayed far enough away from us so that Luis and I couldn't reach him.

He anticipated my thoughts. "I wouldn't try anything, Mason. There's a guard around the cabin now. And I wouldn't hesitate to shoot you, you know."

"I wouldn't doubt it. I'm surprised you haven't done it already."

His long narrow head bobbed up and down. "Of course. There is a reason, however. I don't mind explaining. It will also serve to tear the veil of mystery, so to speak, from the entire proceedings."

He looked at Mary again. "Or would you prefer that I let you explain to Mr. Mason? I assure you that I won't be too easy on myself."

I didn't care who did the explaining. Frankly, I was burning with curiosity. It was a queer stroke of fate which had brought the three of us together again in such an out of the way place.

What Mary and Russell Blackwell could be doing on this Ecuadorian mountainside I couldn't imagine. Nor how she had changed her status from that of an employee of Blackwell's associate to a prisoner. And not to forget my primary interest, what the whole thing had to do with the ghosts of the Quitus.

Mary disregarded Blackwell's question to her and he was about to go on. Behind us the door opened again and Blackwell paused. He waited politely until the newcomer walked around us and stopped at his side.

I had never seen this man before. At first glance I wouldn't have thought him worth remembering. His skin was the color of a dirty Idaho potato, and when he smiled at Mary his teeth showed discolored and crooked.

He wore a thick black moustache and he himself was short and thick. When he was younger he had probably been husky; now he was middle aged and his paunch hid the buckle of his belt. I didn't like the way his black, pig-eyes glinted at Mary.

LUIS hadn't said a word, but I heard him suck in a breath as he saw the man beside Blackwell. I looked at him and saw that his own eyes had remained expressionless, but they were narrowed down to slits. It was apparent that Luis knew the stranger. And it was equally plain that he hated him. I wondered who the man was.

Blackwell introduced him to me, or rather me to him. "Senor Perez, may I present Senor Mason?" Perez gave me a brief nod. I didn't return it.

Perez. The name sounded familiar but it was a few seconds before I could place it. Then I caught on. Alfredo Perez, ex-dictator of Ecuador. So those rumors had been right. I remembered what Luis had told me about him, and I remembered the shooting in the street. Perez didn't look so inconsequential to me now.

But mystery was piling on mystery. What possible connection could he have with Mary Shelton? Blackwell hated to give me at least one answer

to my unspoken questions.

"Senor Perez is the gentleman who was Miss Shelton's mysterious employer."

"You mean you were hired just to help smuggle him into the country?" I asked Mary.

She started to reply, then hesitated and looked fearfully at Blackwell.

He shrugged. "It doesn't matter. You may tell him anything you wish."

His words had an ominous ring. I knew then that he didn't intend to let us go. I looked at him and saw Perez nudge him and motion toward the door.

Blackwell said, "We must ask you to excuse us for a while." Just before he closed the door behind them he looked back. "I believe I mentioned that there are guards outside." Then he was gone.

I turned back to Mary. "Now, maybe you can tell me what this is all about. And how you happened to get tangled up with Blackwell and Perez."

She nodded. "It's really not so hard to understand. But I'll tell it from Blackwell's viewpoint rather than mine. It will explain things more clearly.

"He was making a hurried trip through Ecuador several years ago—apparently running from the police of another South American country. By chance he stumbled across this spot. Centuries ago the Incas did some mining here.

"He knew enough about mining to see that the entire mountainside was rich in valuable minerals. In fact, there is a fortune in silver alone almost beneath our feet.

"Blackwell wasn't sure just how much was here, but he didn't intend to share it with anyone. So when he got to Quito he established contact with the proper government officials and hinted that he would pay a large bribe for the exclusive rights to mine this area. Of course he didn't tell them where the mines were.

"They turned him down cold and threw him out of the country. The present government intends to develop the resources of the country for its own people.

"But Blackwell didn't give up. He seems to have been quite familiar with South American politics and he knew that Perez was living in the United States. He found Perez and agreed to help him reestablish his dictatorship in return for complete control of the mines.

"SO BLACKWELL returned to Ecuador in the guise of a legitimate businessman. Actually he made contact with the remnants of the Perez forces. Then he set up a camp here and made it a storehouse for the arms which he was smuggling into the country.

"Then I was brought into the picture. I'm a metallurgical chemist, and Blackwell needed one to essay some of the ore and to run some tests to see how far the veins extended. He figured that a woman would be easier to handle than a man.

"Of course I didn't know anything about all this. When I heard of the job I immediately applied. There aren't too many jobs like that for women in the states, and besides, this seemed adventurous.

"It was Perez who hired me. He used an assumed name and told me that he was a mining man whose competitors were trying to beat him out of his discovery. The whole affair was to be kept secret. He would pretend to be a businessman and I his secretary. I really thought that Blackwell was merely an associate of his.

"I didn't find out the truth until we

got here. My suspicions were first aroused by the number of armed men. Then I happened into one of the cabins and found it was really a storehouse full of machine guns and ammunition."

I interrupted. "And that's when you quit?"

"That was part of the reason. There was something even more important in my eyes."

"How do you mean, even more important?"

Until now Mary had been telling a straight story. Now her manner became intense.

"I'm coming to that part," she said. "When I got here I found that they'd been sinking shafts into the rock and blasting out samples of ore. They're still at it."

I snapped my fingers. "So that's what the rumbling in the ground was!"

"Yes. I suppose it would carry all the way down the mountainside."

"But what's the point in sinking test shafts? Don't they know what's here.

Mary nodded. "But there's also a queer thing about it. The vein of ore runs almost on the surface. That's why the Incas could work it with their primitive methods. Blackwell wanted to know what type of mining would be most profitable. Unfortunately the vein isn't deep, and the fastest and most profitable way to work it would be to simply strip the surface with power shovels."

I couldn't see what was so important about that. "What difference does it make to you how they do it?"

"A lot. You see, Bill, the vein runs under the forest. And in the forest and the jungle below lies the real wealth of the country! But Blackwell isn't interested in anything except a quick cleanup. The same goes for Perez."

I began to see the light. "And if they ruthlessly strip off the topsoil and the trees, the land is ruined. Is that it?"

"Yes. With that gone everything below would be washed away in time. There would be a bare mountainside and a huge, stinking swamp. It's happened elsewhere."

THAT wasn't going to be so good for the country. The fate of Bill Mason and his straw hats had assumed a secondary importance. All I could lose was a source of supply. For the thousands of people who lived in the land below the montana there would be a complete loss of livelihood, perhaps of their very lives. I wished there was something I could say about it. But there wasn't. And knowing how Mary felt, I wanted to take her mind off the fate of those poor Indians.

"At least our own lives aren't at stake," I philosophized. "They'll merely hold us here until they've taken over the government, and then they can let us go."

Mary bit her lip. "I'm afraid not, Bill. Even a dictator needs public support. Perez couldn't afford to let his people know he's sold them out. And he wouldn't take our word that we won't talk."

It's easy to be calm about someone else's troubles, but Mary's words made the problem a highly personal one. I didn't relish the thought of getting a bullet in the back of my head. Even more than that, I suddenly realized, I didn't want Mary's fate to be the same. Seeing her again was stirring up a lot of old emotions, and some I hadn't known I possessed.

"You seem to know all about their plans," I said.

Her head bobbed up and down. "Yes. They haven't been afraid to talk before me."

That was the worst omen. In fact, it was the clincher. If they had any intention of setting her free eventually, they would have been more careful. I said as much.

Mary's face suddenly burned red, and for no apparent reason she dropped her eyes. I was sure fear hadn't caused it. The effect was more like embarrassment.

My mind leaped to a conclusion. I felt my face grow white with fury, and my hands clenched and opened involuntarily. I remembered the scene on the boat. If Blackwell had been in the cabin then, I would have throttled him gun or no gun.

"So that's why you're still alive!" I blurted.

She got my meaning instantly, and if possible her face turned even redder. Her voice shook a little as she spoke.

"No, Bill. Nothing's happened—I mean, nothing like that. But Perez likes me—"

"So does Blackwell," I reminded her.

She nodded. "Yes. I had some hope of playing them against each other to gain time. But Blackwell isn't going to let me or any other woman stand in his way. As far as he's concerned, Perez can have me if it will make him happy."

"Your escape attempt tonight should have convinced them you don't intend to play," I grunted.

"I'm—I'm not so sure," she stammered. "Maybe—I'll change my mind." She was refusing to look at me as she spoke.

I couldn't say anything. What was there for me to say? It was her life, after all.

Mary was still talking. "He—he may not be so bad."

She meant Perez. I recalled his little eyes and his fat, greasy face, and the way he had looked at her.

It took an effort to keep my own voice steady. "I guess I can't blame you. It's your *life.*"

MARY looked into my eyes and found something there that I couldn't conceal. She flinched, and seemed to crumple inwardly.

"No, Bill—not my life. I can't bear for you to think that."

She didn't have to say more. She couldn't; I had my arms around her and was kissing her hard. Her tears wet both our faces.

Then I stepped back. "You know I couldn't let you do that," I told her.

"But Bill, they'll kill you! You know that Blackwell hates you. And to Perez it wouldn't mean any more than shooting a dog."

"That's what I mean," I said. "No matter what you agreed to, it wouldn't make any difference. Between the two of them they don't have the scruples of a jackal. The minute I was out of your sight and hearing they'd put a bullet in my back."

It was the only thing I could have said. In this case, it was true.

Mary's face betrayed her utter despair. "Then—I'm afraid there's no hope."

I flicked her chin up with my forefinger. "While there's life, you know—" It wasn't exactly the way I felt, but I couldn't let her know that.

And in a sense it's true. Idle talk wasn't going to get us out of this, though.

"Listen," I said, "how much time do you think we have? And what's the layout around here? I couldn't see much in the light we had."

Mary forced herself to stop trembling. Her teeth gritted and the flow of tears stopped. She made herself think about the problem at hand.

"I don't think we have *any* time," she

said. "But they themselves aren't going to leave for another day. For three days men have been leaving with loads of arms for groups of Perezistas all over the country. They pack them over the mountains, hidden under palm leaves and burlap, like bales of hats of crude rubber."

I snapped my fingers. "Then, at the right moment . . . just like that."

"Yes," Mary agreed. "They've stirred up a good deal of trouble. But the government doesn't expect anything like an armed revolt. Blackwell seems to be an expert at this sort of thing. And as for Perez—"

I nodded. "They'd have few peers in the art of murder, I don't doubt. But the point right now is, how many men are still around here? And where?"

She wasn't too sure about the number. "About thirty or forty, I think. New ones have come and gone while I've been here, so I can't be sure."

"Are they all in this camp?" I asked.

"I should say about half. Some are asleep in one of the cabins, a few are down in the mine shaft—if they haven't come up yet—and there are those on guard outside here."

"And the others?"

"They're spread out in a big semicircle down below. That's how Blackwell knew someone was coming. The men heard you shout. If you had continued straight up, instead of coming around and down at the camp, you would have run into them."

"It's odd that they should have no guard above the camp," I mused.

MARY shook her head sadly. "There's a very simple explanation for that. Only one pass cuts through the mountains in this region, and they have a guard near the other end of that."

I was beginning to feel hemmed in, but I didn't want to show it. "All right, then we'll go back the way Luis and I came. Except for one detail, which may help to throw them off our track."

"And what's that?"

"We'll head straight up. But instead of turning left to retrace our steps we'll head to the right before going down."

I had to admit to myself that it wasn't much. But it was better than nothing; certainly better than sitting around like condemned men in a cell.

Mary's expression said even plainer than words that my idea was no good. "What's the matter now?" I demanded.

"I'm sorry, Bill. I don't mean to be a wet blanket. But if you'd seen the ground by daylight you'd understand. To the north it's a network of crevasses and chasms. Some of them are so deep you can't see the bottom."

"You'd certainly narrowed down our chances!" I said bitterly.

She was hurt, I could see that. But I hadn't meant to take my frustration out on her. I put my arm around her shoulder.

"I know it isn't your fault. It's just that our chances are pretty slim if they know we have only one way out. But if you're game—"

"I'm game," she said simply.

"All right then. We may be able to make it. They'll probably call the men up from below when we break out of here. But they'll be spread out pretty thin and it will be dark for quite a while yet. We might slip through."

She still seemed doubtful, although I knew she'd go through with it. I tried to make her feel better.

"Don't worry," I said cheerfully. "With Luis to guide us we're sure to get through."

I looked at Luis for confirmation.

He was leaning against the wall, eyes downcast. He didn't look up until I said, "Well, what do you say?"

He didn't want to say it. His eyes dropped again and he chewed on his lips. Finally he cleared his throat.

"I am sorry, Senor Mason. I cannot go with you."

I couldn't believe my ears! It wasn't that he was afraid; of that I was certain. But if not that, what then? Remembering the way he had talked in the hotel room, I was equally sure he wasn't sympathetic to Perez.

"Do you mean to say you're against trying to escape?" I demanded incredulously.

He still refused to look up. "No, senor, I am for it. But you see—three of us together—"

"So that's it! In plain words, you mean we'd be a burden to you! To save your own hide, you'd—"

"No, Senor Mason!" If I had hit Luis with a whip I could not have cut him more. He came upright with a jerk and his eyes were hot. Then he regained control of himself. When he spoke his voice was low, but steady.

"You do not understand. For you, it is your life. For me it is more than that; it is my country. I cannot afford to fail."

It was my turn to bite my lips. I hadn't been thinking of that. All I could say was, "I'm sorry."

He saw I meant it, and when I stuck my hand out he took it with a smile.

"Of course, senor. One does not think of patriotism except in connection with one's own country."

His voice got crisp. "And now . . . how do you propose we escape from this cabin?"

While that was necessarily the first step I had been leaving it for last. The cabin door had no outside lock, and I had figured all along that if there were no other way we'd have to go out through that door and trust to luck and bad shooting.

NATURALLY, if there were some other, surer, method, we'd try that. With six rifles blazing at close range we wouldn't have much chance the first way, no matter how bad the marksmanship.

I looked about the cabin to see what possibilities it offered. Not many, I had to admit to myself. Although not built for permanence, the walls were thick. There were only two windows, one near the door and one almost opposite. Both were about five feet off the floor, big enough for a man's body to go through, and covered with dark cloth which made them light-proof. They were merely openings, with no glass in them.

Since the window near the door was useless to us, we were left with only one alternative, the opposite window. And outside that there were at least two guards. We could hear their footsteps as they went back and forth, and the mutter of their conversation.

But it was the safest exit, and I cast about for a way to utilize it. There was nothing in the cabin which might serve as a weapon unless we used the leg of a chair. All the light was furnished by a single, large kerosene lamp.

My first thought was to use the lamp to start a fire and then try to get away in the resulting confusion. Of course that left the possibility that we might be burned to death if something went wrong; and I'd rather be shot to death any day.

The idea about the lamps wasn't wasted, though. It led to a second thought which offered greater chance of success.

"Got it!" I said happily.

Luis and Mary drew closer, and in

even lower tones than we'd been using I told them my plan. It was pretty simple, and if it worked we'd have the advantage of a slight head start.

There wasn't much to tell. Mary nodded her complete agreement. Luis had something to say, but it didn't concern the immediate problem.

"One thing, Senor Mason. If we should get away safely there is a chance that we may not have to remain separated."

Since escaping from the cabin was only the first consideration, I was more than eager to hear what he had to say.

He went on. "At first we will split up, but later—Do you think you could find that rock on which you rested?"

"I don't know. I could try."

"All right. I shall make certain to pass that rock. If you are not there, I shall wait fifteen minutes or so. For you two to attempt the jungle alone would be suicide."

Fifteen minutes isn't long, but it was a magnanimous offer. I knew how much those minutes meant to Luis. They would seem like hours to him.

I put out my hand. "Thanks, Luis. Good luck."

He shook hands with me and then with Mary. "Good luck to both of you," he said simply.

There wasn't any more to talk about. Either we'd make it or we wouldn't. And if we didn't—well, that was nothing to talk about.

THERE was only a moment's delay. Before I blew out the lamp, Luis took down a heavy mackinaw which hung on a nail. Then he wrapped it around a pair of high leather boots which had been thrown in a corner. When he was finished tying the sleeves together he had a bundle which looked like a large baby in a blanket.

I didn't ask him what he wanted it for and he didn't volunteer the information. When he was ready he merely nodded to me.

I blew out the lamp and lifted it off the table.

We were in pitch darkness now, but only for a second. Almost at the same instant Luis pulled aside the dark cloth over the window. A bit of starlight entered the cabin, but the men outside wouldn't notice the change unless they were unusually observant.

They weren't. For an interminable half minute we waited, holding our breath, but the footsteps and the muttering went on.

Luis stayed under the window. Mary and I tiptoed to the door, she carrying the chair and I the still hot lamp by the handle.

For an instant we paused; then with a twist of the knob, and a jerk, I flung open the door.

"Hey!" I bawled.

Two of the guards converged on the cabin door, swinging up their rifles to cover it. I hadn't counted on two of them getting there at once, but one got ahead of the other and that made it all right.

I waited until the first guard was about five feet away. Then, with all my strength, I slammed the hot lamp square at his face!

It hit lower than I'd intended, and luckier. The chimney of the lamp hit the shoulder high rifle barrel, and splintered. At the same time, the fuel container split. A mixed shower of glass and hot oil caught the running man, blinded him and made him trip. As he went down the one behind piled into him.

We didn't wait to see more. As I slammed the door shut, Mary propped the chair tightly under the handle. It would be impossible now for the door

to be opened from the outside.

The man who had been hit by the lantern was yelling, and there was a concerted rush of feet toward the front of the cabin. The back was clear.

Luis was already out of the window. Mary and I gained it in three jumps. Just as I lifted her through, the pounding began at the door. They were trying to batter it down, all five or six of them.

I didn't need any help going through the window, although I skinned my shoulders some. But that didn't hurt until later. Luis gave us a shove toward the left, to get us going in a hurry, then darted off in the opposite direction.

Mary and I were fifty feet from the cabin, and going fast, before anyone knew what had happened. We had maybe another hundred and fifty feet to go before we hit the shelter of the trees I knew were there.

Behind us Blackwell's voice cut through the darkness, high and shrill like a woman's. For once he lost his self-control. He was wild with fury.

"They're gone, you fools! Can't you see they're gone? After them!"

THE night was lit up by the blaze of powerful flashlights. They swung past us, missed us, and swung back. We were caught in the glare, still a hundred feet from the trees.

"Shoot, damn you!" Blackwell was screaming. A rifle went off, then another. Blackwell continued to scream.

Then a deeper voice, a bull-like bellow, drowned him out. It was Perez.

"Cease fire! I kill the man who hits that girl! Alive, do you hear me? I want her alive!"

It was a break I hadn't hoped for. Mary was wearing low heeled shoes and she could run. And the nearest man must have been over a hundred feet away when the shooting stopped.

We would have made it if Mary hadn't tripped. I should have been holding her hand, but I wasn't. At the rate I was going I was ten feet past her sprawling body before I could stop.

There was no time to be gentle. My fingers must have bit into her shoulder as I hauled her to her feet. And then she slipped again!

Before I could grab her again a flying body clipped me across the back of my knees and chopped me down. I rolled over and came up swinging.

With a satisfying jar my fist smashed against the man's jaw. He went down just as another body thudded into me from the side. It threw me off balance and I felt a third pair of arms go around my neck from behind.

Mary was helping me as much as she could. I heard someone scream as her fingers dug at his eyes. Then a fist cracked against the side of her head and she went down to her knees, shaking her head groggily. There was no chivalry in this brawl.

I don't know when I had time to notice all that, because I myself was swinging like a berserker. The weight of the man behind me threw me forward and a little off balance, but at the same time loosened his grip.

His head came over my shoulder; I reached up and grabbed a handful of short hair and yanked down with all my might. Some of the hair was left in my hand as his body sailed over my head and slammed against the ground. For a moment I was free.

But not for long. Two of them shot in from the sides and hit me with something like a cross-block. It was a spine-tearing smash that threatened to throw me in two directions at once.

They were all smaller than I, but there were too many of them. As I tried to get up a knee cracked against my jaw. From behind a fist landed on

the back of my neck at the base of my skull. Then I was smothered in a pile of bodies that stank from a lack of bathing. I was half unconscious and sick at my stomach.

Hurried hands twisted my arms and I felt rawhide bite into my wrists. A couple of them hauled me to my feet, one by the hair and the other by my armpits. The pain cleared my head a bit.

ONE of the men had Mary on her feet. Both of her arms were twisted behind her too, and she was mussed up considerably. But she looked more angry than hurt. Her eyes were blazing and her breath was coming fast. She looked at me to make sure I wasn't badly damaged.

"I'm sorry, Bill," she gasped. "My fault again. If you hadn't come back for me they would never have caught you."

"Forget it," I told her. "It was a good try, while it lasted."

It had been better than that. The first man I had hit was still out cold. One of the men Mary had clawed was still wiping blood from his eyes and trying to make sure he wasn't permanently blinded. The man who had tried to strangle me was flat on the ground and bleeding from the scalp, and another was hobbling about and holding his knee in both hands. Not a bad score.

Blackwell was not in sight. The sound of heavy gunfire snapped me wide awake and made me aware of his absence. The firing came from the north, to our right, and we looked in that direction to see what was happening.

It was Luis. They had him caught in the glare of at least a dozen powerful lights. He was bent over double, and scurrying through a litter of broken rocks and boulders toward a deep crack in the ground that was eight feet across or more. He seemed to be trying for the top of the great chunk of rock and drew his feet under him for the leap. He hadn't got very far over the rough ground, and in the cold light under the cotton shirt and pants that were sweated tight to him, he looked thin and frail.

I knew he wasn't frail. But that wasn't going to help, not if one of those rock-chipping bullets hit him. The shooting was about as bad as shooting could be, but there were a lot of guns going off and they were all aimed in the same direction. The law of averages said that one of those bullets would hit that thin figure.

That law held up. There was a sudden shout from the men with the guns, and a yell of triumph from Blackwell, as Luis suddenly straightened. Then the boy's body half twisted, and crumpled. He rolled toward the edge of the rock, hung at the brink for a split second, and went over.

The shooting stopped. In the silence that followed we could hear the dull sounds which Luis' body made as it bounced from side to side going down.

As our group walked back toward the cabins we saw Blackwell and two others detach themselves from their bunch and climb laboriously over the rocks. It took them quite a while, and when they got to the top of the rock and looked down with the aid of their flashlights it was plain they could see nothing. That crevass must have been a thousand feet deep. They turned around and came back.

I wasn't surprised to see how bad I felt about Luis. In the few days I had known him I'd grown to like him a lot. And, more than that, I respected him.

Then my mind was pulled back to our own plight. Blackwell was coming toward us and he had a pistol in his

hand. His long, thin face was bleak with fury. The men around Mary and me split up and got out of the way. Blackwell's hand came up and I sucked in a breath. This looked like the end. But Perez stopped him. Until now the fat man had remained in the background. His voice was cool.

"Put down that gun," he said. "You might hit the young lady."

"Exactly what I intend to do," Blackwell told him. "And Mason, too. Do you realize what could have happened if they got away?"

"But they did not get away," Perez reminded him. "Besides, I told you I have other plans for the lady." His tone said that he wouldn't like it at all if those plans were interfered with.

It said other things too, things I didn't like. I hated the oiliness about him and the way he looked at Mary. But I was sure that Perez wasn't going to let Blackwell shoot her, and I breathed easier.

BLACKWELL swung his hot gaze to cover me. It was filled with venom. "And Mason?" he asked. "Do you have plans for him, too?"

Perez shrugged. "What do I care about Mason? You can cut him in little pieces if you want."

I was afraid he might have given Blackwell an idea. Certainly the man with the gun hated me enough to do just that. It would have been a way to combine business with pleasure, as far as he was concerned.

But Blackwell had cooled off a bit. "No," he said with a tight, bloodless smile. "This will do nicely." The gun came up again and centered on the bridge of my nose.

"You'd better not," Mary broke in suddenly.

Russell Blackwell favored her with a mocking grimace. "No? And what do you propose to do about it?"

She gave him her answer emotionlessly. Her words were the only ones which could have saved my life. And the tone in which they were said was the only one which could have done it. There was no threat, just a statement.

"If you shoot Bill Mason I'll kill myself at the first opportunity."

That was all Mary said, but it was enough. Blackwell knew it and his face contorted with fury. A vein popped out on his forehead and swelled to the thickness of a pencil. Perez knew it too, but he nodded admiringly and smiled his oily smile.

"So that is how it goes, eh, between you and Senor Mason?"

"Precisely."

"And you want to bargain, is that it?"

"Yes."

This time Perez grinned broadly and ran his finger over his moustache. His eyes were shining, eating Mary up, and his oddly colored skin glistened like well oiled gun metal.

"Good!" he said approvingly. "You are not stubborn. I hate stubborn people—except myself, of course." Perez broke out in a booming laugh that had no humor in it.

Some of the men joined in, as though in appreciation of his humor, and Perez suddenly looked around at them. The corners of his mouth were turned down now and his eyes glazed over.

He spoke in Spanish. "Who told you to laugh?"

That hollow laugh, and his sudden change of character told me a lot about him. Blackwell and his men had probably known it all along. Cunning as Perez was, and he was cunning enough, he was also a little mad. I suppose too much power can do that to a man.

And it was plain his men feared him

as death itself. Their laughter was simply chopped off, and they re-arranged their faces so quickly that their teeth clicked audibly. It was almost laughable; but it wasn't funny.

Perez turned back to Mary. His grin was pasted back on his face, and his voice was as calm as ever. There had been no interruption, his manner said.

"And something else I like about you," Perez told Mary. "You are not excited; there is no heat. You say it and you mean it. Later you will not change your mind."

I let out a snort of disgust. "What's to prevent you from changing *your* mind later?"

"Don't talk like a fool!" Perez snapped. "I could change it this minute if I wanted, could I not?" He made a cutting motion with his hand. "I could skin you alive if I wanted, eh? But I do not! I am willing to bargain. Leave it at that."

He seemed in earnest. While it's never possible to be sure about a man like Perez, it sounded to me as though he meant what he said. Blackwell thought so, too. And Blackwell didn't like it.

"Do you realize what will happen if Mason gets back to the United States with the story he'll have to tell?" he blurted. "The girl's an American citizen, you know."

"You know, you know," Perez mocked him. "Of course I know. Also, how to handle those matters. I was once before head of the government of Ecuador—you know."

He dismissed Blackwell with a shrug and turned again to Mary. "Well?"

She was icicle cold. "You haven't really answered Bill's question. How can I be sure you'll go through with your end of the deal?"

"I am coming to that. Of course, you understand why I cannot release him now, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Very well. But in a few days everything will be settled. He leaned toward Mary. "I want it to be a permanent arrangement between us, you see. So I will satisfy you. With your own eyes you will see Senor Mason get on the boat. And when you will get letters from him you will know that he is home safely."

From his point of view he was being quite fair. I looked at Mary. There was a happy glow on her face. She hadn't expected that much. But I just couldn't let her do it for me.

"That's a hot one!" I exploded. "Both of you standing there and bargaining over me as though I were a sheep. Haven't I anything to say about it?"

"YOU are hardly in a position to say or do anything at all," Perez reminded me coldly.

"That's what you think! I'm in a position to gum up the works for you. And I'm going to do it, too!"

Maybe a goaded bull or a wounded tiger could look as mean as Perez did. Maybe a very hungry rattlesnake could achieve it. I don't know; I've never seen any of those, but I don't believe they could. His voice came in a sibilant whisper.

"And what, senor, is it which you are going to do?"

"Nothing much," I admitted. "But if I try to get away again you may have to shoot me. Or, if Mary does see me get on the boat, but doesn't get any letters, she can't ever be sure you've carried out your end of the bargain."

I thought I had him there, but he was even smarter than I'd given him credit for being. There was a sneer on his lips as he answered me, and he had just enough contempt in his voice to

go with his words.

"So that is how Senor Mason loves his Mary, eh? If you cannot have her, then no one shall! To whom do you think you talk so?"

It was a rhetorical question. He thumped himself on the chest before answering. "You speak to Alfredo Perez, senor! Alfredo Perez! And let me tell you one thing: If I cannot have her on my terms, I would as soon cut her heart out and feed it to the pigs! Remember that, my Senor Mason!"

All my life, I said to myself. All my life. He had me where he wanted me, and he had Mary where he wanted her, too. Each of us was forfeit for the other's life, and there was just nothing we could do about it. But I'd remember Alfredo Perez. And boats sail south as well as north.

THIS cabin was small and the walls were thin, without chinking between the logs. Like the other cabins, it had no real windows, just openings cut in the walls. I was alone Mary was in the big cabin.

Morning came early. The first shafts of sunlight hit the mountain peaks far above and were reflected down to the camp. I took my first good look about the interior of my prison.

It had evidently been used as a storeroom, but all that was left in it was a heap of tarpaulin in a corner. All, that is, except the heavy wooden chair in which I sat, and to which my arms and legs were securely tied. Blackwell had done the tying himself.

Sleep came quickly, despite my attempt to fight it off and despite the discomfort of my position. My body seemed to be a single ache from head to foot, but that didn't stop me from falling asleep either.

How long I slept I didn't know; when I awoke the day was well along, as evidenced by the even distribution of the light. I was still alone. My arms and legs were numb and my aches were still with me, but I felt much better. I was hungry.

For a minute or two I considered the advisability of going on a hunger strike. Then I remembered Alfredo Perez and decided not to. And if I were going to do anything more active I would need food. A man can't fight on an empty stomach.

Figuring that there must be a guard outside the door, I let out a tentative yell. "Hey!"

A voice from the other side of the door snarled, "Silencio!"

I tried luring him in with my best assortment of Spanish oaths. That brought no better results; in fact it didn't even get a reply.

There was only one thing left to do. I leaned forward in the chair until the back legs were off the floor. Then I settled back with a crash that shook the cabin.

The door burst open and I was staring into the barrel of a heavy automatic. Behind the gun was a young fellow in a shabby dark straw hat and tattered trousers. His face said he was none too bright; his shoulders said better not mention it. They were very wide.

When he saw that the chair was still upright and that I was still firmly attached to it he grunted angrily and started to back out of the door.

I tried being pleasant. "Amigo," I said. "Buenos dias."

The lines at the corners of his mouth turned down lower and he spit at my feet, just missing them. I got angry.

"Food!" I bellowed.

"Silencio!" he snarled. He came back toward me and it looked as though I were going to get the back

of his hand.

Very quickly I said, "Perez!"

THAT stopped him. It was a name to conjure with. He hadn't the faintest idea what I meant by it, but he wasn't taking any chances. Without saying another word he about faced and marched out of the cabin.

Ten minutes later he was back. With him he brought a tin cup filled with hot, bitter coffee, a bowl of yellowish mush, and another young man with a gun.

He set the bowl of mush on the floor beside the chair and then poured the blistering hot coffee down my throat. It hurt, but it was good. Then, the second man keeping the gun on us all the time, he picked up the bowl of mush and fed it to me with a dirty, tarnished spoon. And he fed it to me the hard way. Several times I didn't get my mouth open in time and the spoon cut into my lips. There was mush all over my chin and my shirt when I was finished.

But there was a good deal of it inside me too, and I felt much better. "Never feel right until I've had my morning coffee," I said cheerfully in English.

That didn't mean anything to either of them. My guard scowled at me at said, "Shot op!" Then he looked proud. He really wasn't very bright at all. But he still looked as tough as ever, and that would have to be taken into consideration.

When they were gone I settled back to do some thinking. I was sure of one thing: Perez would see that my life was safe as long as I didn't try to get away. Of course, that was exactly what I wanted to do. And at the earliest opportunity.

Which brought up the question of Mary. Any attempt I made to escape would endanger her life as surely as it would mine. There was only one answer to that; either we both went, or both of us stayed. It made a nice problem with which to pass the time.

The door opened again. It was Russell Blackwell, and behind him came my guard with his ever ready gun. Blackwell had deep hollows under his eyes, but he looked quite cheerful. In fact, he was smiling. It was a pretty good smile, from the point of view of a snake. You could charm a bird with it.

"Glorious day out," he surprised me by saying. "Wonderful to be alive on a day like this, isn't it?"

I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of seeing me squirm. "I'll bet you're happy for me."

"Oh, quite. Quite. A bit of reflection convinced me that a quick death would have been the easy way out for you. The manner in which Senor Perez has arranged things will mean rather a prolonged mental anguish for you, you know."

"You know, you know," I mocked him the way Perez had.

"Yes, of course." A spot of color appeared in his cheeks, but he kept an iron control over himself. "On the other hand, Perez has compensating virtues. His own distorted code of honor, for instance."

"Your own is sane, of course," I jibed.

He shrugged. "It serves me quite well. I shall have my silver and Perez will have your Mary. And you?"

I couldn't help biting my lips. Blackwell grinned his nastiest grin. "Remember what happened to your arm when I got my hand on it?" I reminded him. "The next time I'll put it around your throat. And I'll squeeze until your eyes pop out of your head."

He wasn't perturbed. "Too bad you

won't have the chance. We're pulling out of here at dawn tomorrow. Within three days there will be a new government, and you'll be on a steamer bound for the States."

Blackwell casually walked around me. "Really, I just came in to make certain you were still secure."

THERE were four rods which formed the back of my chair, and each of them was an inch in diameter. My arms were pulled over the top of the chair and my wrists were tied two dowels apart, in such a way that I couldn't exert much pull on them. The dowels were firmly fixed; I'd tried them.

Blackwell tested the ropes around my legs and found them as tight as when he'd tied them. Then he moved his examination up to my wrists. Those too were secure, but he managed to dig his nails into me as though by mistake. I didn't let out a peep.

Before he left he gave me a parting jab. "Shall I give your best to Miss Shelton?"

"Please do. And to your friend Perez. Tell him I'll see you both in hell before I'm through!"

The worst of it was that I couldn't make a move until after dark. Perhaps it would be later than that. I was due for one more meal, at least, and there would be another inspection of my bonds by Blackwell.

Until then I could sit and think—and listen to the sounds of activity outside in the camp. There was a lot going on out there. I could hear Perez and Blackwell supervising the preparation, and shouted goodbyes. It was even possible for me to tell when a group was ready to go; the footsteps would be slow and heavy under the burden of arms and ammunition.

Finally I got tired of just sitting there alone. I yelled for the guard again and this time he came in at once. He was as sullen as ever.

"Water!" I demanded.

Without a word he left the cabin. When he returned he carried a rusty dipper full of water. I drank as much as I could and he contrived to spill the rest down the front of me. I didn't mind; I couldn't have been much more uncomfortable anyway.

"Thank you," I said politely. He was already on his way out.

Surprise made him reply without thinking. "It is nothing."

"How are you called?" I wanted to know.

"Riccardo," he said. This time he didn't slam the door so hard.

That was a little progress at least. I couldn't see yet what good it was going to do me, but his manner had become less sullen. Another thing I had found out; he would answer my call at once. Orders from Perez, probably.

A half hour or so later I tried Riccardo again, just to make sure. If anything, he came more quickly than before. I went through the motions of drinking a little water and this time he forgot to spill it.

"One grows weary standing guard," I said as he was about to leave. He shrugged, not unpleasantly. As long as his job required no thinking he wouldn't tire easily.

Then I spent some more time trying to figure out a way to get out of the chair. It couldn't be anything too violent; that would bring Riccardo on the double. As for untying my hands, that seemed out of the question.

All the knots were on the inside of the heavy dowels and my palms were turned outward, away from me. Even if I should succeed in loosening the ropes sufficiently to twist my hands around, the loops would still be too small for them to go through.

IT LOOKED like I just wasn't going to get loose, and that was all there was to it. And there was no use worrying about it if I couldn't do anything. I found out long ago that all you get from worrying is gray hair. So I relaxed, and before I knew it I had dozed off.

Riccardo woke me when he brought in my supper. It wasn't worth waking for; the same yellow mush I'd had earlier. For dessert there was a slice of bread to go with the bitter coffee. But the mush did fill an empty space within me, and the coffee seemed to restore a bit of circulation to my arms.

No light filtered through the chinks in the walls and I knew it was night. But I had no idea what time it was or how many hours I had slept. I asked Riccardo for the time.

He shrugged. What difference did it make to him? He wasn't going anywhere special. Besides, he probably couldn't have read the time on a watch if he owned one.

I did get some sort of answer, however. It was vague, but it served, and it came after a bit of head scratching. "About two hours after sunset."

If I had waited I might have asked Blackwell. He was sure to be along soon to see that I was tucked in for the night. But I wouldn't have been able to stand the smirk on his face when he asked me if I had a date.

He showed up in an hour or so. While Riccardo stood over us he examined the ropes and saw they were still tight. Then he relaxed and gave me his number one smile.

"Hope those ropes aren't causing you any discomfort," he said solicitously.

"Not at all. I always sleep this way," I told him. I was hoping he'd get out so I could go to work on them.

Blackwell was in no hurry. "Good. I was worried, you know. But your ordeal won't last much longer. We'll be moving out in eight hours."

That was information worth having. Most of the men would be asleep soon. I didn't want him to know he'd told me something important. If I could have thought of anything flippant to say I would have said it. But I couldn't; so I said nothing.

"Not very garrulous, are you?" Blackwell taunted. "Well, I dare say it is rather a repulsive thought, Mary and Perez."

I would have given anything if I could have concealed my anger. But it was no use. I felt my face grow hot and I knew it was red as fire. My tongue got so thick that it threatened to choke me.

"I feel for you, Mason," he smirked. "Really I do, you know. Had some aspirations in that direction myself. But I suppose it is a step upward for Mary. Just think, she'll be the first lady of Ecuador."

"Blackwell," I gritted through set teeth, "I'm going to get back here somehow. And when I do, I'm going to kill you with my bare hands!"

His eyes narrowed to slits and his lips drew back a little. "Do that, Mason. Do that. I'd want you to. I owe you something, you know."

Blackwell's right hand came around in a ten-inch arc and his hard, bony fingers cracked against my face. It was worse than a punch. My head was slammed around almost over my shoulder and when it bounced back it felt like an apple quivering at the end of a long stick.

For a few minutes my eyes were full of tears, and I saw through them as through a fog. My head thrummed as though the slap had ruptured the eardrum. Inside, my tongue tasted blood where the cheek had split against my teeth. By the time I could see semi-

normally again, Blackwell was gone. So was Riccardo.

A LONG time had to pass before I could recover from the insane rage which gripped me. Then little by little I choked it down and forced myself to cool off. I found that my eardrum was as good as ever. On reflection, I figured that the incident had its profitable aspect too.

Blackwell wouldn't be coming back after that slap. It had all the marks of a farewell gesture. And, having got some of his hatred for me off his chest and translated into physical action, he would probably sleep well.

I wanted to get going at once, but forced myself to wait. If I was allowing myself six hours I could afford to give one up for safety's sake. By that time everyone who was going to sleep that night would be asleep.

During that hour I made tentative plans, saw mental images of Blackwell's condition if I ever got my hands on him, and thought about Mary. Mostly, I thought about Mary. It made the time pass more pleasantly.

At last the time was up. Outside there was no sound except that which came from natural causes. Once in a while something scraped against the wall of the cabin, just to the left of the door. That would be Riccardo taking some of the load off his feet. It would be good, if I ever untied myself, to know exactly where he was.

Then I set to work. The first objective was to get enough play in the ropes which bound my wrists so that I could turn my palms inward.

But Blackwell had used strong cord, and pulled it fast. I tried to force my arms apart and they wouldn't go. Then I leaned forward as far as I could, and struggled desperately to pull my arms in the same direction.

I don't know how long I strained and pulled and tugged and sweated. The cord bit deeper and deeper into my wrists, until it seemed to hit bone. Something wet dripped onto the backs of my hands. Blood.

And just when I was ready to quit, just as I started to cave in from pain and exhaustion, I felt a little slack in the cord!

It wasn't much, but to me it was like a bucket of cold water in the face of a man dying of thirst. It wasn't much, but it revived me and drove the pain from my wrists.

Now I could turn my hands around. All it meant was that I had a chance. That chance was life itself. With nerveless fingers I fumbled and felt for the knots.

They were only an inch away, but too far. I couldn't get my fingers around the dowels so that I might work on those knots. Still, that was a minor difficulty after what I'd been through.

Slowly, patiently, I twisted my wrists back and forth. Every twist changed the position of the knots by a fraction of an inch. At last I had them behind me. And it was still no good.

Was this to be the last torture, the torture of hope? Escape was at my fingertips, and I couldn't reach that far! By bending my fingers to their utmost I was able to touch the tips to the knots. No good.

But I wasn't ready to quit yet. I'd got over the hump, and that thought was enough to keep me going. There had to be a way and I was going to find it.

I rested for a minute or two. Then I got going again. If I couldn't do the job with one hand at a time I'd try both. By turning my palms inward again, and bending my elbows out until the cords bit deep, I was able to cross my hands.

And it was still no good. By the very maneuver which enabled me to cross hands, I was forcing my wrists away from each other. I simply could not do more than touch my fingertips to the knots. But it was my last chance and I knew it. The only other way to get my arms out of the loops would be to cut my hands off.

So I tried again. No closer. All I got was a grip on the middle two rods as my fingers slipped back. I tried again; I could have kept trying forever. Every time my fingers ended by hooking themselves about the dowels.

IT BECAME a monotonous routine. Elbows out . . . lunge; touch fingers to knots . . . slip; try again. Over and over and over. I could have kept it up all night.

I didn't, of course. Eventually I learned; learned by a process as painful as that by which man has dragged himself up out of the muck of ignorance, learned by experience—by the very fact that the solution was thrust into my hands again and again.

Every time my fingers slipped I ended by clutching a pair of the rods in each hand! And for an instant my grip tightened convulsively, then relaxed. But the pain in my wrists was so intense that I didn't realize what was happening.

Each time I grabbed those rods they gave just a little! I suppose I must have been nearly out of my head when I discovered that. Otherwise I wouldn't have had the strength to do it. And, also, I found the strength because I had to; because I could not give up.

I had a pair of rods in each hand, my thumb around one of a pair and my fingers around the other. And I squeezed. They bent; they had to bend! At top and bottom they were anchored so firmly that they could not be loosened. So they had to give in the center.

And give they did! My body was leaned all the way back, pressed against the chair to give my arms more play, and it dulled the splintering sound of the wood. Suddenly my hands felt the end of resistance. There was nothing left to do but pull the cords through the splits in the wood.

Unfastening my legs took an interminable time. I could not have been more clumsy if I'd worn a pair of mittens. But eventually the ropes loosened and dropped off. I was free! I stood up.

And crumpled to the floor. My legs wouldn't hold me. But I had learned patience, too. There was nothing to do but sit there and rub my legs and wait until circulation returned to them. And trust to luck that Riccardo wouldn't happen in.

Stabs of pain and then the prickling of millions of needles told me I would stand soon. Twice I tried it and failed. The third time I stayed on my feet. I swayed and trembled, my knees buckled and straightened, but I remained upright. And the time came when I could put one foot solidly before the other and walk.

Outside I heard Riccardo shift his weight again. His feet scuffled in the dirt, and there was silence again. He was still to the left of the door.

I moved toward that door an inch at a time. When I got there I leaned for a while against it and let some of the tension go out of me. Then I moved over to the right side and put my hand in front of my mouth.

"Riccardo!" I called. My hand muffled the sound, made it seem as though it came from the center of the room.

He came quickly, his feet thudding hard on the earth outside. And he came in through the door just as I had

planned and hoped he would.

There was no lock on this door. If he had come from the right side, the chances would be that he'd open the door with his left hand and have the gun in his right. This way his right hand was closer, and he used it to push the door inward. It swung toward me, hiding me, and the gun was in his left hand. He would have to swing his body around to get a shot at me.

RICCARDO was four feet into the room, his body faintly outlined by the light which came through the door, before he sensed that something was wrong.

He must have heard me jump, because he started to turn. But it was too late. As his body turned toward me I grabbed the gun in my own left hand and brought the edge of my right hand down on the back of his neck with all my strength. It was a free swinging blow, like the stroke of a scythe. It should have killed him.

But it didn't. Riccardo went to his knees, shook his head, and tried to get up. Maybe I'd broken his neck and he didn't know it yet. I hit him again in the same place and he dropped the gun. He was dead.

My fingers ran over him swiftly, felt a knife in his pocket. I took that and his straw hat which had fallen in front of him on the floor. From a distance I might pass muster.

I stepped outside and shut the door gently behind me. Everything seemed quiet and peaceful. The cabin Mary was in had two men guarding it, one in front and one behind. They were more alert than Riccardo had been; they slowly walked to and fro. In the entire camp they were the only moving things.

For a while I stood and leaned against the side of my cabin. Fifty yards of almost clear space lay between me and the big cabin. To cover that distance without being detected was going to be a problem. But I was used to problems by now. There were a few scrubby bushes I could use for cover; they would suffice.

The gun was for later use; I stuck that in my hip pocket. Riccardo's knife I opened and held in my hand. Then I lay down alongside the cabin with my body in shadow and the straw hat sticking out into a patch of faint moonlight. If one of Mary's guards happened to glance in my direction he might think Riccardo had got tired of standing.

Then I crawled back slightly, but left the hat where it was. Gently, slowly, I inched back until I could slide around the corner of the cabin. I was out of danger temporarily.

Working all the way around the back, I snaked myself away from the cabin until I gained the shelter of a small clump of bushes. I wasn't any closer to Mary, but I was out of the direct line of sight between the two cabins.

From there on it was a matter of slow, zig-zag creeping, creeping on my belly. Only one of Mary's guards could possibly see me now; the one in the back. I watched him, moved only when his back was to me. The blade of the knife I kept in my clenched fist; a stray, reflected beam of light was enough to betray me.

TWICE I froze into immobility as the guard looked my way. But he hadn't seen me. Nevertheless, tension was so great within me that it kept me glued where I was for minutes afterward.

The last gap was the hardest, a clear space of twenty feet between me and the end of the cabin. And it was all level ground with not a blade of grass

on it. I lay hidden behind a bush and thought it over.

Crawling over those twenty feet was out of the question. He could walk to the opposite end of the cabin and be back before I'd make it. Only one way to do it, on my feet. And if I made a sound, my goose was cooked.

He got to my end, paused, and started back the other way. Without an instant's pause I was on my feet and moving forward. I had to fight myself to keep from breaking into a run; my shoes were heavy, and a single footfall would bring the guard whirling about.

I got to the side of the cabin just as he about faced for the return trip. The wall was solid and I leaned against it, listening to my heart beat and my breath rasp in my throat. Could it be possible that he would not hear?

No break in his footsteps. That was good. I let him make the round trip twice more, drawing strength within me for the final effort. Then I slid close to the edge of the cabin and waited.

My hand gripped the knife handle tightly; the three-inch blade was cleared for action. He came slowly down to my end of the cabin. There was the faint, slurred sound of his foot turning on the hard packed earth.

Then he had completed the turn and was on his way back to the other end. In a single motion I was around the corner and after him. He never heard me come up behind him.

The first intimation he had of my presence was when my left arm encircled his neck and pulled back under his chin before he could duck his head. The edge of my wrist smashed into his throat and stilled any possible outcry. At the same instant the knife in my right hand slashed down over his shoulder and buried itself in his chest. Blood gushed over the knife hand.

Three times more I stabbed him before I was sure he was dead. I wasn't experienced at this sort of thing, but I made up in vigor what I lacked in finesse. The job was done. I lowered the body soundlessly to earth.

Now for the man in front. He was still pacing back and forth, though more slowly than when I'd first seen him. I heaved a silent prayer that he wouldn't decide to take a rest before I got around to him.

He was a good guard; he didn't pause. I slid carefully around one corner and down to the next. The guard's steps came toward me, moved away. Last trip, I said to myself.

I wasn't going to waste time on this one. The knife was closed. I put it back in my pocket and took out Riccardo's automatic and hefted it. It was heavy; harder than bone.

Footsteps grew louder, paused. Weight shifted onto one foot. It made the same slurring noise as it ground into the dirt as the other had made. He started away and I came around the corner after him. Fast.

The blow split his head, drove it down between his shoulders and at the same time sent him sprawling forward. He lay with his face in the dirt, blood wetting his hair, not moving. He would never move again.

I TRIED the door. It was not locked and I swung it inward, came in with it. She was not asleep; the catch in her breathing as she saw the door open was audible.

"Mary," I whispered.

They had bedded her on the floor, on a thick layer of soft pine needles. The scent filled the cabin and I heard them rustle as she came to her knees.

"Bill!" It was an unbelieving whisper. "It can't be . . . How . . .?"

I dropped beside her, kissed her once. Then I put her hands under her

shoulders and lifted her to her feet. She wasn't tied.

"No time to explain now," I told her. "Plenty of time later. Let's go."

Mary came along like a sleepwalker, still unable to accept the testimony of her senses. We went out the door and she saw the guard's body in the widening pool of blood. She sucked in a sick breath.

"Wait," I said. "I want his gun. We may need it later."

I bent to pick up the rifle he'd carried on his shoulder. The butt was sticky and I wiped it on his shirt. Then I hurried around to the back of the cabin and got the other guard's rifle. Unfortunately, neither man had a cartridge belt on him.

Far below us the sounds of the forest and jungle were fading. It would soon be morning. But as yet no one stirred in the sleeping camp. Mary carried one rifle, I the automatic and the other rifle. We ran toward the line of trees to our left, the same trees we had failed to reach the evening before.

A single moment before we reached the trees the first rays of morning slanted up and illuminated the peaks far above us. Reflected beams came through the treetops, poked fingers of light around the camp. We had made it barely in time.

Mary's face bore the marks of strain and worry. She was dead tired and in no shape to run. Neither was I. But run we must, for behind us the camp would soon be awake. At least we were out of sight.

One advantage daylight had. There was no danger of our getting lost and wandering in a circle. The trees were not thick here, and there were large, clear spaces. I could see downward far enough to plot a course. But they would be expecting us to go that way, so first we'd have to swing straight south for awhile.

Sound carried well up here, and sooner even than I'd expected we heard excited cries from the camp. They had discovered our absence. Then there came shrill yells of rage from a throat which could only be Blackwell, and after that the booming voice of Perez.

WE HAD stopped for a brief rest, and Blackwell's words came clearly to us. "No, no, no!" he was shrieking. I wondered what was going on back there as Perez drowned Blackwell out.

Then we got going again. I figured that there wasn't much chance of being caught if we kept moving. After all, Blackwell and Perez had no way of telling in just what direction we had gone, and we had a fair start.

But I hadn't figured on one thing. Most of the men were barefoot. A few wore flat, heelless sandles. Blackwell, Perez and I were probably the only men around who wore shoes or boots. And I'd forgotten another, Mary.

I looked back at the ground behind us. Wherever there was a patch of bare earth my footprints were plainly visible. Mary's heels were no less well defined. Trailing us would be a cinch.

It was too late to do anything about that, however. Behind us, but still far enough behind to allow us a little margin of safety, there were already sounds of pursuit. We stepped up our pace.

With me holding her hand and helping her over the rough spots, Mary kept up pretty well for a while. But not for long. I couldn't have run much longer myself. And the men behind us were fresh from a night's sleep.

There was only one course open. We had to throw our pursuers off the track and then find a place to hole up for the rest of the day. As we ran I

watched for a likely place. In the meantime we kept to ground which had a good sprinkling of pine needles. Now we had a lead of only a half mile or so.

They had cut it down to a quarter mile in a short time. And then, for once, we had a real stroke of luck! Suddenly the trees ended, and there was a great stretch of solid reddish rock which would show no marks.

For a distance the great outcrop of rock slanted upward at a slight angle. Then suddenly, half way up, the angle became one of ninety degrees and the rock rose straight and sheer until it was cut straight across at the top. The face of the cliff was pocked and weatherbeaten, and just where the angle became abrupt nature had hollowed out a shallow ledge that was at least ten feet long. Here and there on the incline were chunks of red rock, scattered haphazardly. Several larger rocks lay almost before the ledge.

It was a natural hideout! If I could roll a couple of those small rocks in front of the ledge Mary and I had a good chance of remaining undiscovered. And if we were found . . . well, I had three guns and all were loaded. They would have to come up after us if they wanted us, and they would have to come across an open space.

We had fifteen minutes to climb that forty foot slope. I practically had to drag Mary, but despite that and the time we wasted by being careful not to dislodge any loose stones, we made it with time to spare. While she stretched out panting on the ledge, I gingerly rolled one of the stones into a slight depression before her. We were well hidden now, and well protected. The stones before us gave plenty of cover, yet there were gaps through which to aim a gun and scan the ground below.

More than a half hour elapsed before our pursuers showed up. Apparently they had had some trouble tracking us over covered ground. Mary and I lay on our bellies and watched the first of them come through the trees.

He was joined a minute later by another, and then a third. In a short time there was quite a group, all of them carrying rifles and sidearms. Blackwell and Perez came last, both of them armed only with pistols.

There was a hurried consultation and a lot of head scratching. They knew we had come out of the trees at that point. But where had we gone from there? Glances were thrown in our direction, but as far as they could see from where they stood, the face of the rock offered no concealment. The ledge was screened off and so was the hollow behind it. And the low rocks in front hardly looked big enough to hide two people.

AFTER another short talk with Blackwell, Perez barked an order and the men split up. By ones and twos they combed every inch of ground along the edge of the trees and the outcrop of rock. It didn't take them very long—there were thirty-three men in the party besides Perez and Blackwell. I counted them.

As far as they were concerned, Mary and I had vanished into thin air. We grinned and nudged each other as we saw the bewilderment on their faces. There was a lot more head scratching when the men reported back.

Perez was in a frenzy. He cursed each man who reported failure, and offered fantastic rewards to the one who should find our trail. And when the last man had given up I thought Perez would burst with rage.

Blackwell was angry, too. But not about the same thing. We found out in a moment what he had meant when we

heard him shriek all those no's at the camp. For once he seemed ready to defy Perez.

"Forget about them!" he yelled at his fat partner in crime. "They can't do us any harm now even if they get away!"

"Idiot!" Perez bellowed. "I don't want them to get away! I want that girl!" He shoved his face into Blackwell's. "Do you hear me?"

Blackwell wiped his face with his palm, and when his hand had passed the anger had passed with it. The change was almost miraculous. A moment before he had been bursting with rage and vexation; now he was calm, almost placid.

I knew it was not fear which had caused the change. Blackwell could have, and would have, killed Perez without batting an eyelash. But if Perez died, so would his own chance of possessing the mountain treasure.

"Of course I hear you," the thin man said coolly. At such close range, you know. But really, in another day you'll be in a position to close off the border. Then it's just a matter of time. They can't possibly get away."

Perez stared at him balefully. "Don't you understand? Have you got ice-water in your veins?" He thumped his chest, apparently a favorite gesture. "When Alfredo Perez wants something he wants it now!"

Blackwell had to wipe his face again. "Naturally. But on the other hand. . ."

Perez held up a hand to stop the words Blackwell's calmness was having its effect on him. "All right. It would be dangerous to waste more time. I know that. We will compromise. I want one more hour, that is all. They cannot have gone far. Now, will you stop pestering me?"

It was better than Blackwell had hoped for. He even helped them go over the ground again. It was plain to them that Mary and I had come onto that stretch of rock. Our footprints were evidence of that. Then at some point or other we must have left the rock. Unless we had sprouted wings.

Meanwhile Mary and I lay on our little ledge and watched them. And watched the sun come higher. The face of the wall grew blistering hot, and our position more uncomfortable by the minute. But for an hour we would endure the discomfort easily.

There didn't seem the least chance of their finding us. Many times, as he stood below us, Perez swept our hiding place with his eyes. The sheer rock would have looked forbidding even to a fly. He shook his head and looked away.

In the end they would have to give up. And give us up they did, before the hour was finished. So many times had they gone over the same ground that, even, if we had left footprints their own would have obliterated them.

The men were washed up. But Perez wasn't; in his own way he was more stubborn than Blackwell. He had to have a last fling. His thick forefinger pointed out three of his younger men.

"You three! Climb that!" His finger shifted to point to the rock.

Blackwell stared at him. "But that's impossible!"

"How do you know? Have you tried it?" Perez demanded. "Maybe it can be done!"

THE three men looked at Perez. It was obvious to them that the sheer wall could not be scaled. But they had no choice. And Blackwell was forced to let Perez have his way. It would take only another ten minutes. While he and Perez stepped back into the shade of the trees, the three climbers started up the incline.

Our luck had run out. With only ten minutes to go, we were trapped by an insane whim! The three had split up, one on each side and one in the center. The center man woud have to go around the very edge on which Mary and I lay.

I looked at her. "This is it," I whispered. "Do we surrender, or do we shoot it out?"

Her eyes went down to where Perez sat beneath a tree, his greasy face clearly visible and his thick hands folded under his paunch. She didn't take much time deciding.

"I guess we shoot it out, Bill."

I waited until the man coming up at us was only twenty feet away. Then I shot him through the chest. He didn't have a chance to get his hands up to the hole the bullet made. Gathering momentum, his body rolled down.

One of the others had turned and started to run at the sound of the shot. The other, the one on our right, stood stock still for an instant. I nailed him in the side of the head before he could move. Then I tried to hit the third man on the run. He tripped and fell, and I thought I'd got him. But he rolled the ten feet to the bottom and came up running. I had only succeeded in wasting a precious bullet.

By that time their pals had vanished. Not a man was to be seen. But they were there, all right. A fusillade chipped rock all around the ledge, and Mary and I had to duck our heads to avoid flying particles which could have been as dangerous as bullets.

The fact that he had lost two men didn't bother Perez at all. I could hear his gleeful shout coming from behind one of the closer trees.

"So I was right! We have got them! Like rats in a trap!"

"If you've got them," Blackwell's cold voice suggested from behind another tree, "why don't you go up and get them?"

"Don't worry," Perez called back. "I will." He called off five or six names. "Charge them!"

He didn't get a very quick response. They knew where we were. And they knew they had us trappd. But they had also found out that I could shoot pretty accurately. They would be like sitting ducks as they came up that incline.

"Cowards!" Perez bellowed. "I will shoot every man who disobeys my order! Do you hear me?"

They heard him. It was almost certain death to obey the order. But at least they had a chance. With Perez they had no chance. They were as good as dead if they disobeyed the order. Like scared rabbits the five broke from cover.

Leaping and bounding from side to side, they made poor targets. Maybe I'd get a couple of them; the others would reach us. But I reckoned without Mary.

Beside her lay the rifle she had carried. Without a quiver in her voice she said, "I've done some shooting."

Dragging the rifle, she squirmed over to the next rock on my left. Then she smiled at me. "I'll take those on this side."

She had nerve, too. There was no sense in wasting bullets. Those five men were not going to stop until we stopped them. So Mary waited with me until they were more than half way up.

"Aim for the belly," I told her. Mary nodded and we both cut loose. But we didn't fire wildly; each shot had to count.

We got a break. At our first shot, the charging men brought up their guns and started firing. It was a bad move for them, a good one for us. They

didn't have a chance of hitting us, and in order to fire, they themselves had to stop jumping. And the incline was slowing them down.

MY SECOND shot was hurried, but it caught a man in his leg and tumbled him backward. He lost his gun as he rolled down. I saw one of Mary's go down at the same time. Then they were almost on us and we were too busy blazing away to keep score.

We got all of them. But in the heat of battle we had forgotten that we had no spare ammunition. All that was left was the automatic, fortunately with a full magazine, and a single shot in each of our rifles.

After the first attack we had a few minute's respite. Mad though he might be, Perez was still too good a general to waste men uselessly. He tried persuasion.

"You had better surrender!" he yelled up to us. "After all, we can wait here until you are starved out!"

I knew better than that. Waiting was likely to be far more expensive for him than for us. But I didn't bother to answer. Perez knew it too.

He began to boil over. "You fool! I promise you your lives! Do you hear me? Alfredo Perez swears it!"

I didn't answer that one either and Perez gave it one more try. "Surrender at once or both of you die! That girl too! Do you hear me?"

I looked at Mary and she grinned at me. "Tell him where to go," she said. I told him.

He didn't waste any more breath on us. Within ten minutes he had another crew of five coming up after us. And this time they made things a little tougher. From the shelter of the trees came a covering of fire which forced us to keep our heads low.

But we had to see in order to shoot, and our faces were stung and cut by flying chips of rock. And this time we had fewer bullets to waste. I had put both rifle cartridges in one gun and given it to Mary. I kept Riccardo's automatic.

We brought them all down, but at the expense of our last bullet. The final shot sprawled a dead man less than five feet in front of us. This one didn't roll back, but lay with his arms stretched toward us. And his rifle was only a few feet from his body. I had to get it.

Cautiously I squirmed to the end of the ledge and prepared to make a quick dash for the gun. It couldn't be too quick, though, for there was the danger of falling. Then I leaned back on my heels and started forward, hunched over to make a small target.

They didn't see me at first; Perez and Blackwell must have been in conference. Before anyone realized that I was out in the open I had the gun and was on my way back. Their shooting was too startled to be good. Mary had my free hand and was helping me back behind the rocks by the time their sights stopped weaving.

A howl of rage came up from Perez and then Blackwell's voice telling him to relax. There was another conference behind the trees. I wondered what was going on down there.

In a few minutes I found out. What I thought was a stroke of fortune, was going to backfire. That is, getting the gun. Blackwell figured it out; trust him to do that.

"Mason!" he called out.

"What do you want?"

"I suggest you'd better come down. We know you could have had only three guns, those that belonged to the guards back at the camp. And they must be empty, otherwise you wouldn't have risked your life to get the fourth one

just now.

"So what?" I was killing time. I knew what.

"We have more than twenty men left. And you have eight bullets at the most. We're bound to get you this time."

I told him where to go.

"Mason!" It was Perez. He had got tired of Blackwell's slow methods. "I will tell you one thing. We are going to take you both alive. Unless you give up now, it will be too bad for you. Do you hear?"

I heard. And I knew what Perez meant when he said it would be too bad for us. I looked at Mary. Maybe I ought to try to make a deal.

Mary must have known what was in my mind, because she shook her head at me. "It's no use, Bill. We'll go out together. Just remember to save two bullets for us."

I nodded, checked the magazine. At least there would be a few more who'd go with us. Then I leaned toward her. "Kiss me goodbye," I said.

SHE kissed me, just a quick one. But it didn't have to last long. Just the rest of our lives. And the time was almost up. "I'm sorry, Bill," Mary said suddenly. "I guess I haven't brought you much luck."

"Forget it," I told her. "I didn't know you were going to be up here when I came. And if not for you, I would have been dead last night. You know that."

I looked down to the line of trees. They were already running toward us, more than twenty of them. Only Blackwell and Perez remained behind. That made me feel bad. I said, "Kiss me again, Mary."

She kissed me, and then I rolled over on my belly and prepared for work. It was surprising, how icy cold I was. My only thought was to make each bullet count.

They were starting up the incline already, spreading out fanwise from the center, shooting as they came. I reminded myself to save two bullets. Then I sucked in a deep breath and tightened my finger on the trigger.

The gun bucked against my shoulder and a man tripped over his own feet and went down. There were so many of them that I couldn't miss. I said to myself, one down, and took another deep breath.

Before I could pull the trigger a second time, another man fell. Then a third, a fourth, a fifth! My eyes popped. Could they be victims of some mysterious disease?

My question was answered when the next man went down. There was an arrow sticking out of the side of his neck! And then there came a hail of the feathered missiles, each so swift that my eye could not distinguish them individually!

All of the arrows were coming from one side, the left. It was where Mary and I had come out of the woods, and the trees concealed the archers. But I didn't care who they were, just so long as their aim remained good and they had plenty of arrows in their quivers.

For not more than ten men remained on the incline. I snapped myself out of my amazed revery and got back into action. Now they were close enough so that I could tell which my rifle was taking care of and which had arrows in them.

Then the sound of another rifle was added. Puffs of smoke came from under the trees at the left. Artillery too! Only five of the twenty-odd attackers were left, and the flank attack proved too much for them.

They whirled in mid-air and started a headlong rush toward the bottom. They never made it. I accounted for

one with my last bullet; the others looked like pincushions as they died.

Then a mob of yelling, tattered Indians broke from the woods. They were led by a thick-chested man who carried an old rifle in his hand, and by a thin boy in a torn shirt.

I recognized the leader, Texpkactl! Shabby as the rest of his men, he still looked like one of the conquering Incas as he ran forward. Snatched from the proverbial "jaws of death," I was still too befuddled to even wonder how he had got here.

And then, amazement was succeeded by almost total stupefaction. For the thin young man at Texpkactl's side was Luis!

Seconds ticked by, seconds during which I had the eerie feeling that I was dead, after all, and seeing a fellow shade. I jerked my head away and looked at Mary. She, too, was standing with her mouth agape, unable to believe her eyes.

But it was true. A moment later he stood beside us, thin chest heaving and features drawn with weariness, but his eyes were ashine with happiness.

"I was afraid, Senor Mason," he panted, "afraid that we would come too late."

"One minute later and your fears would have been justified," I told him. "But I still can't believe it. Why—good Lord, you're dead! We saw you die!" I turned to Mary for confirmation. "Didn't we?"

She nodded, wide eyed, still as unable as I to accept his apparent resurrection. We stared at each other, and then at Luis. I reached out a hand and touched him, as if to make sure he were real flesh and blood.

Luis smiled wanly. "No, Senor Mason; you did not see me die. It was . . . how shall I say?" He tried it in Spanish. "*Illusión.*"

"Illusion?" I grunted. "Listen, I've seen Houdini, and he couldn't have done it. Besides, you had no mirrors."

AT THAT he laughed aloud. "No, senor, no mirrors. But you forget my little bundle which I carried with me! You see, fortunately for me, and despite all their shooting, they did not hit me. But I pretended they did. And as I rolled over the edge of the deep crack, I dropped my bundle. It is that which you heard falling down. But I, myself, did not fall. To the edge I clung with my hands, and swung myself along until the light would not discover me. When they went away I pulled myself back up."

He told it so simply and matter of factly that it didn't seem very heroic. I shook my head in admiration.

"And then you ran all the way back to Mapala, explained the whole thing to Texpkactl, and led him and his men up here, is that it?"

"But senor, how else could it be done? And then, for a minute, I thought I had failed after all! For we went directly to the cabins. And you were all gone! We set out to follow you, but there were so many trails, and we took the wrong one."

"How did you finally manage to find us?" I wanted to know.

"Most easily, Senor Mason. We heard the shooting. There was a great deal of it in this direction. Then I thought back to the three dead men we found in the camp, and it seemed not impossible that you had escaped and were now fighting here against Perez and Blackwell."

He had figured it out perfectly. But his words reminded me of something I had completely forgotten in the excitement of the last few minutes. Perez and Blackwell! They must be a mile away now, and going fast.

"Luis," I grabbed his arm. "We've got everyone except the two ringleaders! They were hidden in the woods there when you showed up."

"Don't worry about that, Senor Mason," he advised me. "Two of Mapala's swiftest runners are on their way to Riodomba. From there the news will go by radio or telephone to Quito. The government will be prepared and the revolt will be crushed before it starts."

"No," I said. "You've forgotten two things. First, it's a long way from Mapala to Riodomba. And second, there's that pass through the mountains. Perez and Blackwell will take that route, and they may beat your runners."

From the stunned look on Luis' face I knew that he had forgotten the pass. But he recovered quickly. Turning, he rattled a string of mixed Spanish and Indian dialect at Texpkactl. Then he swung back to me.

"You and Miss Shelton had better go back to the camp, senor. One of the men will go along to guide you. In the meantime we shall be after Perez. He cannot travel fast enough to get away."

"Maybe he can't," I told Luis, "but Blackwell certainly can. And I've a few scores to settle with him. I'm going with you, not back to the camp. A couple of men can take Miss Shelton there. She'll be safe enough with them."

"You are in no shape to go further," he protested.

"Neither are you, but you're doing it," I snapped. "If I fall behind you can leave me. Just let me get my hands on him, and we'll see how good a shape I'm in."

He saw there was no use in further argument. It would only waste valuable time. I kissed Mary and told her I'd be with her soon.

"Please, Bill, take care of yourself. I couldn't bear it if anything happened to you now."

"Happen to me?" I laughed. "After what we've been through, nothing new could happen." I got serious. "These men are interested only in Perez. But I just wouldn't ever feel right again if I let Blackwell get away."

"Sure. I understand."

I joined Luis and Texpkactl beneath the trees. As closely as I could, I indicated the spot where Perez and Blackwell must have stood. Within a few minutes Texpkactl had picked up their trail.

IF IT had been a source of amazement to me to see how Luis had picked the shortest possible path through the dense growth of the montana, it was even more astonishing to watch Texpkactl follow a trail. Each fallen leaf, each blade of grass, each bent twig on a bush, told a tale which he read as easily as I can read a newspaper.

Perez and Blackwell had waited until all the men from Mapala had left the woods. Then they had cut around behind and gone back over the trail which led back to the camp. Blackwell was almost as good at concealing his trail as Texpkactl was at tracing it.

Many times we had to stop. At first it seemed that Blackwell was heading away from the pass, and that he had given up hope for Perez and the revolution. Then, suddenly, the trail swung away from the camp and back toward the pass.

Texpkactl split up his men into two groups, one to follow Blackwell's trail with us, and the other group to head direct for the pass. If Blackwell continued to double back and zig-zag, as he had until now, the men could easily beat him there.

It turned out to be a ruse to divide our party. My first guess had been right; Blackwell had no intention of going through the pass. He was intent

now on saving his skin.

We lost his trail for a while, then picked it up again. The men were spread out in a long, straight line, with Texpkactl, Luis and me in the middle. It was a good system. As we began to catch up with our quarry, the trail grew fresher. Now, each time it went off at a tangent, one of our men was sure to pick it up.

And we were getting closer and closer! As we went between two trees which grew close together, Texpkactl pointed out a spot on one of them where the bark had been nicked. Probably by the barrel of a gun. Texpkactl stepped up the pace.

Blackwell must have sensed our nearness. He became less and less cautious in his eagerness to make better time. Even I could see where he and Perez had brushd against thorny bushes and left threads in their wake.

Until this point, Blackwell seemed to have been following a clear cut plan. Despite all his turns and twists, the trail had held to one general direction. But he was getting panicky now. The sudden tangents became more frequent and less logical.

Then, for a brief instant, we got a glimpse of the two! As the woods became thicker and thicker, it got harder to see for any distance ahead. When we came to a large, easy to scale rock, we took advantage of it.

On an overhang, where the ground sloped sharply downward, the rock made an excellent point from which to survey the land below. Luis, Texpkactl and I clambered up and looked over the woods which lay before us.

It was Luis who spotted them. A single glint of sunlight on a rifle barrel was sufficient to attract attention. A half mile ahead, they were. Luis pointed out the spot where he had seen the brief flash, and we strained our eyes in that direction.

Blackwell and Perez had thrown caution to the winds. An easily followed trail of waving bushes was behind them. Once we even got a glimpse of Blackwell's white shirt. And the route they were following would soon lead them into a small clearing.

I borrowed Texpkactl's rifle. At the distance I had a fair chance of hitting Blackwell. If I didn't, the shot might still serve a useful purpose. For now he would know how close on his heels we actually were. And if he got more scared than he was, his panic would betray him.

Then they were in the clearing, both of them in full view. Perez had a rifle in his hand, Blackwell carried a holstered pistol. Both of them looked wildly around as they started across the clear bit of ground. I fired two shots in quick succession.

They were even more frightened than I thought they would be. My shots missed, by how wide a margin I couldn't tell. But they had an effect. The puffs of smoke were clearly visible to Perez. He swung around and emptied the magazine of his gun in our general direction. Then he turned and ran madly, close on Blackwell's heels.

They were going south when they left the clearing. Had they planned it, they could not have done worse. For, if they continued that way, they were heading into a natural dead end. The subterranean forces which in immemorial times had heaved those mountains skyward had not done an orderly job.

FROM the rock where we stood, we could see that Blackwell and Perez would make swift progress for another mile or so. The trees would thin out and the going become smooth. But they were going to end in a wide, shallow canyon with perpendicular sides.

We scrambled down and started after them. Having had the advantage of seeing the scene from a height, we were able to plan our route through the thinnest growth. Despite their lead we gained on them quickly. Within ten minutes we passed to one side of the clearing, taking a straighter path, and in twenty minutes we were only a few hundred yards behind.

Several times, as the growth thinned and the trees grew more dwarfed, we caught sight of them. I brought up the rifle and snapped a shot at them, more in the hope of spurring them on than of hitting them.

Foolish as it was, Blackwell turned and answered my fire. Even at that distance his aim was as good as I had thought it would be, and we had to seek cover. But he had wasted more of his precious bullets. Now he was getting into the same position in which Mary and I had found ourselves a little earlier.

The chase took on the aspects of a tiger shoot in India, with those two taking the part of the tiger, and all of us the beaters. There were even shouts from behind to add to their fear and to urge their fast failing legs to greater efforts. Several times again, Blackwell fired back at us.

So we herded them into the canyon before they quite realized that its turns and windings would only lead them to a blank wall. Then we left a group at the entrance, to cork the bottle, as it were. And Texpkactl, Luis, I and the remainder of the men skirted the top.

We found them at the end of the canyon. There were no trees in it, only some scraggly bushes and some scrub grass. But there were plenty of rocks, and they had taken shelter behind a large one. We couldn't get at them for a clean shot, but neither did Blackwell dare expose himself.

I listened for a while to their rasping breathing. Then I called down to where they lay hidden, fifteen feet below. "Blackwell!"

There was no answer. I hadn't expected any.

"Your turn to surrender!" I yelled again. Luis was at my side and he grinned.

Again there was no reply. This time I used threats. I was following the same procedure which they had used before. "We'll give you two minutes to come out. Then we're coming in after you. And it's gong to be just as unpleasant for you as it would have been for Mary and me if you'd got us!"

Blackwell would have been willing to remain there like a trapped animal in a cave. And he would have drawn some satisfaction out of taking as many of us with him as he could. But Perez couldn't stand the pressure.

"I will surrender!" he yelled at the top of his lungs. "Do you hear me? Perez surrenders! I am coming out!"

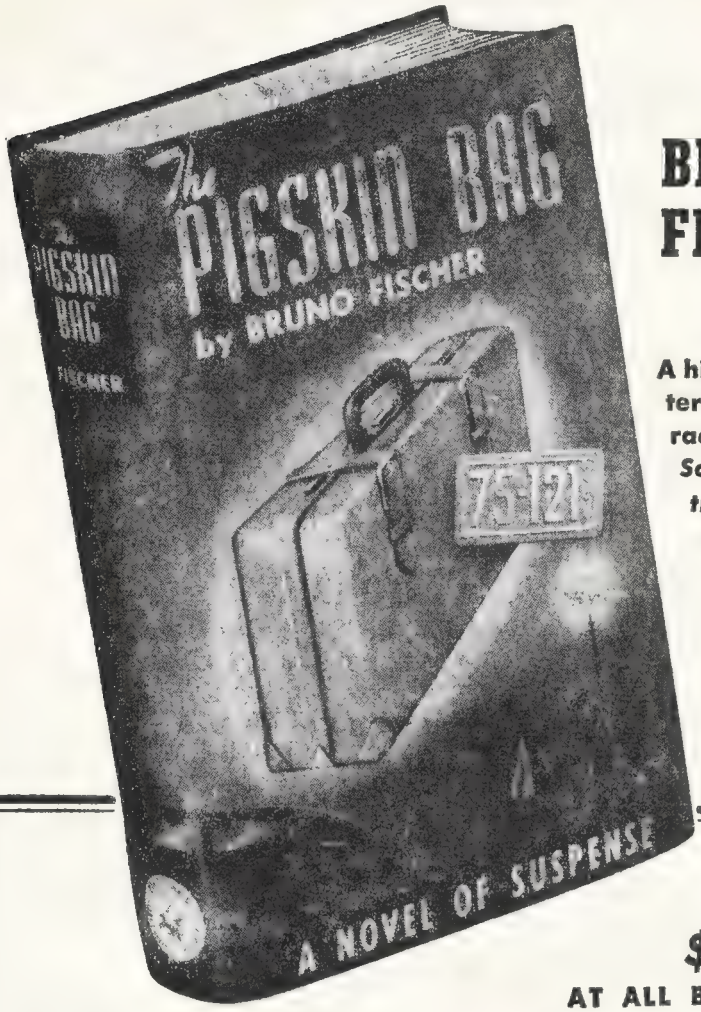
I waited a few seconds. He didn't appear. The great slab of rock lay tipped at an angle against the canyon wall and hid them both. "Are you coming, Perez?" I demanded.

His voice sounded hysterical. "I am coming! Wait!" Then he began to plead with Blackwell, and I understood why Perez hadn't appeared.

"Please, Senor Blackwell! We must surrender. We have no chance." His voice rose higher. "You don't understand! I know those men. They will have no mercy!"

Blackwell's tone was as cool as ever, but it had a tenseness to it. "Neither have I, you dirty coward! If you hadn't gone running after that girl I wouldn't be here now. And now you want to run out on me!"

I could picture in my mind the scene behind the rock; Perez, greasy and pale



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with fright, backed against the canyon wall by Blackwell's gun. But he tried once more. "Please!"

Blackwell had a sudden and unbelievable change of heart. His voice was low, but still clear to us above. "All right. You can go ahead."

We heard Perez's breath come out in a whoosh. Then his dark head appeared. "I am coming!" he called. It was a tight squeeze, and he scraped off skin, but he made it.

Shaking with fear, he took two faltering steps out toward the middle of the canyon. And behind him, around the edge of the rock, Blackwell's hand appeared. The gun in it roared; Perez pitched forward on his face, a part of the back of his head gone. The second shot was for good measure. I heard Blackwell say coldly to the corpse on the ground, "Scum."

The shock of surprise had left me standing on the canyon rim. And Blackwell saw me; he had counted on that moment of inaction, and his head darted out for a quick survey of the situation. I was a perfect target.

BEFORE I could leap back out of sight the gun in his hand tilted up. At this range Blackwell wouldn't miss. His finger pulled back the trigger.

And nothing happened! As I flung myself desperately at the ground I heard a faint click. The gun was empty. Blackwell's last bullet had been spent on an already dead man. For once Blackwell had given in to his emotions, and they had betrayed him.

I picked up the rifle I had dropped, and scrambled to my feet. There was an angry curse from below and Blackwell's pistol sailed past my head. It was close but I didn't have to dodge.

He had come out from behind the rock, and was standing stiff legged in the middle of the canyon. His face was turned toward me. Pale, intense, it showed all his hatred and all the evil in him.

"Go on, shoot!" he croaked. His composure had cracked. Now he was just a lonely man waiting for death, still unafraid, but without hope.

Beside me, Luis whispered, "Shoot the dog!"

I raised the rifle to my shoulder, and dropped it. That was what Blackwell wanted. He wasn't afraid to die as long as death would be quick and easy. But he didn't deserve that.

Too many thoughts filled my mind. To fire that fatal bullet was too cold, too impersonal a thing. And I wasn't cold and impersonal toward Blackwell. I hated him. Again Luis muttered, "Shoot him!"

For reply I handed him the rifle. "No. I'm going down there. I've been promising this to myself for a long time now."

I ran down toward the mouth of the canyon. There was a place where rain had washed out a long, slanting slide to the bottom. Half sliding, half running, I was down there in a few seconds. Blood pounded in my temples. There was only one thing I wanted, to get my hands on Blackwell.

A single turn of the canyon wall lay between us. I would go around it, and he would be waiting for me at the end. I ran swiftly and reached the bend.

Above me Luis yelled, "Watch out!"

Just in time I caught myself, flung myself outward, away from the wall. A rock flew past the place where my head had been an instant before.

Blackwell had not waited for me to reach him. Waiting until my footsteps told him I was almost at the turn, he had leaped forward and scooped up the rock in a single motion. The sudden move had caught Luis flatfooted and he had recovered almost too late to regain his balance.

Before I could regain my balance, Blackwell was on me. One of those hard fists drove me backward against the opposite wall. But he didn't follow up; he had no desire to get in close where I might grab him.

He turned and leaped toward a spot in the center. There were only a few patches of dried grass, nothing on which to slip, and plenty of room for him to move around. With instinctive sureness, Blackwell had chosen the most advantageous position for himself.

No smile was on his lips now. His face was bleak and determined. Only one of us was going out of that canyon alive, and he knew it.

I came in slowly. To rush would be to play his game; Blackwell was too shifty and fast to be caught off guard. Foot by foot I advanced until he was within arms' reach. He stood stock still, and I stuck out a hand tentatively.

Blackwell's eyes hadn't missed a thing. They'd seen the raw, skinned wrists. Quick as a flash his long fingers, curved like talons, swept out to rake my forearm. Blood spurted from the reopened wound, and a hot stab of pain shot up my arm.

I lunged at him, missed, and his fist cracked against the side of my head. Another attempt to seize him resulted only in another lightning blow to my stomach. He whirled about me, constantly on the move, and I tried to reach him.

More like a bear than a man, I was fighting Blackwell. I had my arms outstretched, waiting for a chance to sweep him into my grip. But he was too fast. When I crouched low to avoid another jab at my middle, his fist would shoot out to land on my face. And he would be gone before my arms encircled him.

EVERY punch was solid. Eventually they would weaken me and wear

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me down. I changed my tactics and stood up straight, with my hands in front of me. And I stood in one spot, flat on my feet and turning slowly instead of chasing him.

Now Blackwell was taking three steps to my one. I was harder to hit, and if he had to keep going at so fast a pace it was he who would wear down first.

Suddenly he stopped moving and started a hard jab to my face. I didn't try to dodge. My own right fist smashed out at him. But his was only a feint; I hit empty air. As the force of my punch carried me around and threw me off balance, the edge of his hand landed just below my ear.

Had I been standing still, instead of turning in the direction of the blow, it would have dropped me like a log. As it was, I went sprawling sidewards, almost stunned. Instantly he was after me. His foot shot out at my head. Blackwell was out after a quick kill.

I threw up an arm instinctively. It hit his ankle, deflecting his leg and knocking him off balance. He twisted, tried to right himself, and fell to one knee. I was charging him before he could get up.

But he had plenty of tricks in his bag. Blackwell flung himself to one side, supporting himself by the edge of his knee and one hand, and kicked his free leg forward. His intention was to land his foot against my kneecap and break my leg.

The kick landed an inch too low to accomplish its purpose. Instead, as I tripped and fell forward, Blackwell's foot scraped sharply down my shin; it hurt, but it wasn't damaging.

And in falling, my arms went out ahead of me! He couldn't get away in time. I grabbed his leg and pulled him toward me. Instead of trying to pull away, which would have been futile, he gave way at once.

My own tug, and the lack of expected resistance, almost threw me onto my back. Blackwell's fingers dug at my eyes. I yanked my head back and at the same time twisted on the ankle I held. He went over on his side.

My left hand went up to this throat as I flung myself on him. As Blackwell's hands went up to protect himself, I dropped my grip on his ankle. While I fought with one hand for a secure grip on his neck, I used my other hand like a mallet to pound on his chest.

As he brought down a hand to protect his chest, I smashed his head against the ground. Another blow lower on Blackwell's chest cracked a rib, and I heard him grunt in pain. I thought I had him then.

Not quite. I was on top of him, and he brought up a knee to my groin. Nausea swept through me, took the strength from my arms. Before I could recover, he had rolled aside and was getting up. I went the other way, to get away from him, and to give myself a chance to get back on my own feet.

Once more we circled each other. But things were different now. Blackwell was slower. The broken rib was giving him pain, forcing him to bend slightly, and the pressure on his throat had left him gasping for breath. His eyes were clouded, and blood from my wrist had got into one of them and was making him blink.

WE WERE further down the canyon, too, in a place where longer grasses grew over uneven ground. The next time I swung, Blackwell couldn't get out of the way in time. He was driven back, floundering.

Then I was on him. My hands were around his throat and I lifted him off the ground. His feet kicked at me desperately, but the strength was gone

from them. If they hurt I didn't feel it. There was a haze before my eyes as I pressed him against the side of the canyon and squeezed harder.

I squeezed longer than I had to. His body was limp and lifeless before I stopped. It was Luis who brought me back to my senses. His hand clutched my shoulder and shook me.

"He is dead, Senor Mason. You can let go."

I released my grip and Blackwell's body dropped down at my feet. I didn't even look at him.

"Several times I was about to shoot him," Luis said. "But I thought that you would not want me to, even at the risk of your life."

I shook my head slowly. "No. I wouldn't have wanted you to shoot him. I . . . I'm not exactly happy that I killed him with my own hands. But . . . I guess I had to."

"Of course, senor." Luis understood.

Texpkactl and his men understood, too. As we went back toward the camp I found myself regarded as a sort of hero. It was not so much because I had done them a great service; they appreciated that, all right. But it was rather that they understood personal vengeance.

For a while I didn't feel like talking. Then, as we drew near the camp and Mary, I turned to Luis. "Well, Luis," I said in English, "I guess we have laid the ghosts."

He laughed, and translated my words for Texpkactl. The chief nodded but didn't say anything. He was a silent man.

"Tell him," I continued to Luis, "that now that his people will be able to go into the montana, I will expect them to weave many hats, and quickly too."

Texpkactl listened as Luis told him what I had said. Then his dark eyes looked ahead and flickered. He smiled,

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and said something in reply that brought an answering smile to Luis' face.

"What did he say?" I asked Luis.

Luis smiled again. "He says that Mapala's first bale of hats will be a wedding gift to you."

For a moment I didn't get it. I looked at Texpkactl and saw that he was staring straight ahead on the trail. Then I turned and looked too.

The camp was directly before us, and Mary was standing in the middle of the trail.

HINDU TEMPLE

By ALICE RICHARDS

MARSHALL HALL, world traveler and adventurer, experienced many strange and weird adventures in his life both before his experience in Singapore, which is about to be related, and after, but he has never lived through any more horrifying moments of his life, than those that occurred in the courtyards of a Hindu temple in that city. Even now, many years later, he can scarcely believe what he witnessed, and practically experienced himself, except that he has motion pictures to prove that his was not just a case of mere hallucination.

Shortly after his arrival in that exotic city, Hall was being driven through the night-darkened streets when he came upon a huge Hindu procession, lit with hundreds of flaming torches, with smoke pouring from them. This sight attracted the ever-adventure-seeking Hall, and he stepped out of his car to watch the fantastic spectacle.

The procession was led by dancers, swordsmen and jugglers at a snailspace. Sacred oxen pulled gaily bedecked gods, and the priests were busy blessing the people lined along the streets. The torches were mere pieces of bread, dipped in oil and placed in wire receptacles on the ends of sticks. These pieces of bread were given to the waysiders to eat after being blessed by the priests.

A HANDSOME, well-built Coolie, was standing near Hall and offered to explain the procession as it went along. He explained that Hindus do not stop with believing in religion—that they live it, even at the expense of bodily comfort. This Hall learned to be all too true. But even stranger than that was the fact that this young native told all this in perfect English. To all appearances, he was nothing but a coolie, yet

he had received a Master's degree from Cambridge University. He was living the life of a coolie, because he felt that to know God he had to learn humility, and he had to rid himself of all unspiritual desires. However, he admitted at this point, he was still afflicted with that unpleasant desire for good food.

As the procession passed before these two, the Hindu explained all the rituals being performed before them, and then, since it was Friday, invited his new-found friend to accompany him to the Temple. They turned down a side-street, and arrived ahead of the procession. After removing his shoes, Hall entered the house of worship with his barefoot companion. There, he saw shrines, paintings, and sculptures, all of them bearing some story, which the young man narrated.

After entering the temple proper, which by this time was filled with prostrate worshippers, they could hear the ringing of bells and beating of drums. The whole atmosphere, including a flaming altar, burning incense, and the tempo of the drums, cast a religious fervor throughout the whole temple. Hall's self-appointed guide was a holy man, and he was soon surrounded by curious long-haired black men, all carrying sacred ashes on their foreheads with a dot of red paint between their eyes. Although having such ferocious looks, they displayed a certain gentleness about themselves, which put Hall at ease.

THE crowd was directing itself toward a large shrine. When the curtain which enclosed the shrine was lifted, there was seen through a blaze of light and the smoke of incense burning, a god whose body was adorned with beautiful jewels and decorated with strings of fragrant flowers.

The god passed down along the row through the people in order to bless them all. The Hindu companion by this time had reason to believe, through Hall's intelligent questioning, that he had found a convert. Therefore, he invited him to witness the supreme proof of the conquest of body by faith in God. It was called "purification by fire." A couple of days later, Hall and his new-found friend entered the temple, which was fast becoming filled with people. A small room, separated from the main room, was filled with beautifully adorned women, whom the Hindu disgustedly referred to as unclean, unfit to be anything but the bearers of children and the servants of their husbands. They had not the right to receive any religion except that which was imparted by their husbands. In fact, they were just existing as women in punishment for some sin committed in another incarnation.

AS THEY passed an alms box, Hall threw some coins in, which clinched the matter, and he was believed a convert. At once, he was given some sacred ashes, which he managed to eat, and rub on his forehead, ears, and each shoulder, and paint his forehead red, as a symbol of the blood

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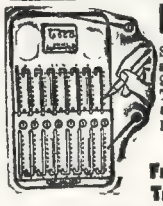

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of women. The sacred yellow powder of Krishna was placed before him, to put a smaller yellow dot upon the red one already on his forehead. He was shown the altar over which presided a vicious-looking red-painted head, which represented an evil man. He had been punished, and had asked that after his hanging, his head be placed in every temple, to warn all evildoers.

Next, Hall was shown a pair of sandals with nails sticking up from them, approximately two inches long, on which the pious were supposed to walk. After feeling that they expected him to perform this task, he was relieved to find that they had merely wanted to show him the spikes, which had bloodstains on them—someone had used them only that morning. By the time he had recovered from this shock, he was presented with small silver pins which the pious used for sticking into their flesh, as a sign of penance.

Hall felt the need for fresh air at this time, so he edged his way out into the courtyard, where an enormous fire, about forty feet long and twenty feet wide, was burning. A shallow pool of water was next to it, and the intense heat which poured forth from the fire, was almost overbearing.

IN A small section of the courtyard, where Hall and his cameras took refuge after the crowd began coming in, the effigies of deities, gaily bedecked with flowers for the occasion, were raised on platforms, so that they were able to watch the proceedings.

The fire, by this time, was raked until a level bed of burning coals made a "fiery carpet to saintliness." Into the rectangular pool of water, priests poured goat's milk, and holy yellow meal, incense and burning lamps were placed at the other end, near the starting point.

Now began the gruesome details of the whole ritual. A young goat was brought in, annointed and the lamp passed in front of its eyes. On its head was placed the yellow meal. Next a man with a huge swordlike knife appeared, and on the rise of a cry from the crowd, brought the knife down and the head of the goat dropped to the ground.

The carcass, still kicking, was dragged around the fiery rectangle. And this was just the beginning!

On a second cry from the crowd, the first of the fire-walkers rushed into the flaming coals and trudged through, followed by another, and yet another.

Next, an old bald-headed man began the trudge, stumbled, and fell head-first into the merciless bed of coals. A cry broke from the fanatics, and the priests rushed forward to pull him out, his skin cooked and white, where it had lain against the coals. Hall, by this time was so nauseated by the sights he forgot to train his camera on the action. He was later informed that the man's misstepping was due to the sins he had committed, and that the watching gods had chose this way of

punishment to reward him!

UNDAUNTED, hundreds more continued through the coals; fathers with babies in their arms; men with silver pins sticking in them, dancing through; one with fantastic hoods of wood and bleached with coconut-palm leaves that were fastened to his flesh with large hooks. Blood gushed from wounds incurred when knives had been stuck through his cheeks.

All of those participating were evidently under an hypnotic strain, and nevertheless, were glad to reach the pool of water.

Women were led around the fire, not allowed in it, as it was to purify and give more religion, and they were not allowed to seek religion until it was given them by their husbands, no matter how great was their zest.

Upon leaving the water, the penitents were treated to a lashing by a priest with a long, ugly whip, and were held in position by others for this new instrument of torture. Afterwards, many had to be carried away by the priests, because they were so badly wounded by the inflicted lashings, supposedly given to reduce the burning of the flesh.

At this point in the spectacle, the Sikh police came on the scene, wielding their clubs in all directions, and soon after, when the last man had struggled through the bed of coals, the priests rushed forward to put out the fire with the water in the large receptacle. The mob rushed forward to eat or take away some of the sacred ash. After receiving some, they left the temple courtyard, and the priests began taking down the idols for the procession which was to take place that night.

After emerging from the thatched enclosure, which had been his hiding place, Hall was met by his Hindu friend, and invited to partake of the evening's festivities. He muttered yes, but after retiring, and resting in his hotel room, he reflected, and only then did the reaction of the day's activities make him aware of the fact that he could never bring himself to view more. He respected that people's strength and fortitude, but he chose to worship God in a different way, in order to earn his purification.

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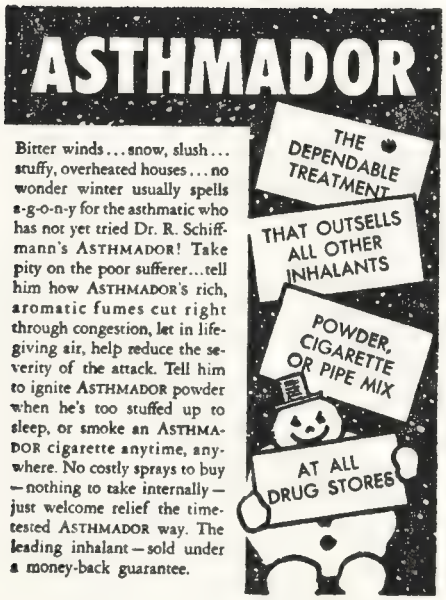

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believes that of a certainty, over the next hill, there lies the crock of gold, set in the rainbow's center, just waiting for its finder.

ANOTHER ancient belief, this time from the Bedouin of the Sahara, is that there is an Oasis of the Sirens—a strange and brilliant sight, which lures unsuspecting wanderers into the vast and desolate sands of the desert, and then vanishes. But man continues seeking out the unexplainable mysteries of the world, knowing the dangers he must face, and yet always hungry for adventure.

In days of yore, it was the Golden Fleece, or the Gardens of the Hesperides, or the Mountains of the Moon, or the Lost Atlantis. Today, it has not altered much. Scientists, who are the world's best-known adventure-seekers, are still on the search for better and faster ways of contacting other planets, and not too long ago, the moon was able to be seen much clearer, through machines which were perfected during the war. As for seeking the Lost Atlantis, there has never been a time when man has not been seeking the answer to this strange and exciting riddle of the continent which is no more.

Today, too, there still remains the unexplored regions of the North Pole, and men are trying to reach coal-mines believed to be in the Arctic, and hope, too, to realize their ambition of reaching the North Pole via submarine.

THERE are the divers, who go in search of the secrets of the deep, and pilots who soar the stratosphere, hoping they may see the day when interplanetary flight will just be routine.

And with all that, thousands of years from now, the lure which captures the hunters for adventure today, will be as unchanged as the sands of time. For something new always will turn up to be explored, although it is admittedly true that there is nothing new under the sun. It may not be new to the universe, but it is to the inhabitant of that epoch, and he'll track it down until sooner or later, it no longer remains a mystery to him or to the people of his time.

The Twentieth Century's adventure is surely not over yet; it has just practically begun. It has seen many explorations, and many successful journeys into the unknown have been taken that less than fifty years ago would have been thought impossible. It is no longer considered ridiculous to go beyond the boundaries of this earth, not to confine oneself to land that is known to be existing. In fact, it is a known fact that there are on file today better and more accurate maps of some parts of the moon than there are of some unexplored regions of the Polar sector.

Yes, adventure seekers go on and on, hoping to answer all the unanswerable questions of their time. But when these men are gone, others will appear to take up the quest for tomorrow's world.

TO THE POLE!

By LUKE CALL

The North Pole has at last taken the count!

MANY of us know that Admiral Byrd made the first successful flight across the North Pole on May 9, 1926. Some, who remember their history, know that Amundsen was the pioneer who tried the first unsuccessful plane flight in 1925. However, not many know that two other attempts were made before either Amundsen or Byrd were thinking of such flights.

Polar aviation may be said to have had its beginning back in 1897, six years before the Wrights had built their first flyable airplane. In that year, Dr. S. A. Andree established his headquarters in Spitsbergen, built a large shed, and in it installed a gas bag. The basis of his plan for conquest of the Pole was to drift across the ice-covered wastes propelled only by winds that usually were blowing in that direction. For a rudder, he used nothing more than a long rope which dragged on the ice. In the bag he had some food, very little Arctic equipment and a large amount of courage and faith. Finally, everything was in readiness, the bag was loaded and the wind from the right direction. Dr. Andree posed for photographs, stepped into the balloon and sailed away over the endless expanse of ice. No one has seen him since.

The next aviator to make a try for the Pole was Walter Wellman in 1907. He too chose Spitsbergen as the base of his operations. Instead of a balloon, however, Wellman had a weird looking motor-driven dirigible. It had worked well in test hops while still in America, and even in the Arctic it had behaved, but one thing had been overlooked. In the far north, weather changes rapidly. Wellman started his flight, but from out of nowhere came a terrible blizzard. Control was lost and the airship was driven into the side of a mountain. The dirigible was ruined, but miraculously Wellman lived to tell the tale. Actually both Poles were reached by dog sled before they were flown over. Now it is just another day's work to hop over the roof of the world, but all honor should go to those who proved it possible.

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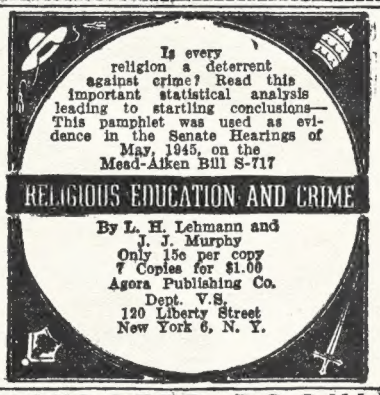
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who are suffering the miseries of

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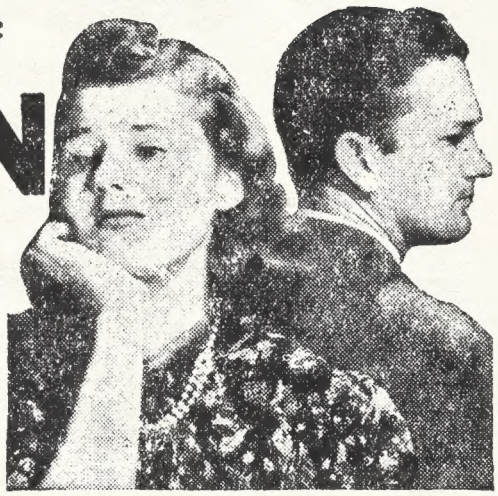

Stop Worrying Now About Pimples and Blackheads

and other externally caused skin troubles

JUST FOLLOW SKIN DOCTOR'S SIMPLE DIRECTIONS

SQUEEZING pimples or blackheads to get rid of them is a nasty, messy business—but that isn't the worst of it. Because doing so may also be injurious and leave your skin with unsightly, embarrassing blemishes. There is, now, a much easier, safer, cleaner way to help you rid your face of ugly, offensive, externally caused skin troubles. You merely follow a doctor's simple directions.

Good-Looking Skin Is Not for Women Only

You—yes, you—can have the same healthy, normal complexion free from externally caused skin troubles simply by giving your skin the special care that handsome screen stars give theirs. There's almost nothing to it—it is just about as easy as washing your face. *The whole secret consists of washing your face in a way that thoroughly cleanses the pores of every last speck of dirt and grime*—something that ordinary cleansing may not do. In fact, examination after examination shows that, usually, it is not a case of "bad skin" so much as a case of incomplete or faulty cleansing. What you should use is a highly concentrated soap like Viderm Skin Cleanser which penetrates the pores and acts as an antiseptic. When followed by a quick application of Viderm Medicated Skin Cream, specks of irritating dirt and grime are quickly washed out; they dissolve and disappear, leaving your skin clean, clear and free of the specks that often bring out pimples, blackheads and other externally-caused skin troubles.

DON'T DO THIS!

Don't murder your skin by squeezing it. Skin is delicate. When you break it, you leave yourself wide open to miseries. It's far easier, far safer, to let the Double Viderm treatment help you enjoy a handsome, clear and blemish-free complexion.

It's Foolish to Take Bad Skin for Granted

It doesn't pay to risk marred skin, blotches, blemishes. Your very success in business, love and social life may depend upon your looks. *Handsomeness and a good appearance usually start with the condition of your skin.* Nobody likes a skin that looks unhealthy, unclean, abused, and marked with blackheads or pimples. WOMEN ARE ATTRACTED TO MEN WHO HAVE SMOOTH, CLEAR, ROBUST-LOOKING SKIN. Business executives don't choose men who have a poor-looking complexion. Don't take chances with your success in life when this inexpensive Viderm formula may help you.

Don't murder your skin! Here's all you have to do to keep it smooth and clear. Use Viderm Skin Cleanser when you wash your face. Rub the rich lather of this highly-concentrated soap on your face for just a few seconds and then rinse it off. Then apply a little Viderm Medicated Skin Cream and that's all there is to it. Viderm Medicated Skin Cream quickly disappears, leaving your skin nice and smooth. This simple treatment, used after shaving, helps heal tiny nicks and cuts, relieves razor-burn and smarting, besides conditioning your skin.

Give Your Face This Treat for 7 Days

Stop worrying and being embarrassed over what may happen to your skin. Just send for your Viderm Double Treatment this minute, and be confident that you will keep a smooth and clear complexion. Follow the simple directions, written by a doctor, that you will get with your Viderm Double Treatment; then look in your mirror and listen to your friends admire your smooth, clear skin—the kind that women go for.

Just mail your name and address to The New York Skin Laboratory, 206 Division Street, Dept. 46, New York City 2, New York. By return mail you will receive both of the Viderm formulas, complete with full directions, and packed in a safety-sealed carton. On delivery, pay two dollars plus postage. If you wish, you can save the postage fee by mailing the two dollars with your letter. Then, if you aren't thrilled with results, your money will be cheerfully refunded. Remember that both of the formulas you use have been fully tested and proven, and are reliable for you. If they don't help you, your treatments cost you nothing. After you have received your Viderm, if you have any questions to ask concerning abused skin, just send them in.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

Let your HEAD take you

(The average American today has a choice of just going where "his feet take him", or choosing wisely the course to follow. Let's skip ahead 10 years, and take a look at John Jones—and listen to him . . .)

"SOMETIMES I feel so good it almost scares me.

"This house—I wouldn't swap a shingle off its roof for any other house on earth. This little valley, with the pond down in the hollow at the back, is the spot I like best in all the world.

"And they're mine. I own 'em. Nobody can take 'em away from me.

"I've got a little money coming in, regularly. Not much—but enough. And I tell you, when you can go to bed every night with nothing on your mind except the fun you're going to have tomorrow—that's as near Heaven as man gets on this earth!

"It wasn't always so.

"Back in '46—that was right after the war and sometimes the going wasn't too easy—I needed cash. Taxes were tough, and then Ellen got sick. Like almost everybody else, I was buying Bonds through the Payroll Plan—and I figured on cashing some of them in. But sick as she was, it was Ellen who talked me out of it.

" 'Don't do it, John!' she said. '*Please* don't! For the first time in our lives, we're really saving money. It's *wonderful* to know that every single payday we have *more* money put aside! John, if we can only keep up this saving, think what it can mean! Maybe someday you won't have to work. Maybe we can own a home. And oh, how good it would feel to know that we need never worry about money when we're old!'

"Well, even after she got better, I stayed away from the weekly poker game—quit dropping a little cash at the hot spots now and then—gave up some of the things a man feels he has a right to. We didn't have as much fun for a while but we paid our taxes and the doctor and—we didn't touch the Bonds.

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